



VICARS' WALK

A chronicle of certain adventures and mis-adventures, traffics and excursions, in the life of Enoch Saint, chorister, soldier, and dean's verger

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by

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published in 1933 by
HODDER & STOUGHTON, LIMITED
at St. Paul's House in the City of London

First Edition *March, 1933*
Reprinted *April, 1933*
Reprinted *April, 1933*
Reprinted *May, 1933*
Reprinted *June, 1933*
Reprinted *September, 1933*

*Made and Printed in Great Britain for Hodder & Stoughton, Limited,
by C. T. M. & Co., Ltd., Liverpool, London and Prescott*

*To the memory of all those who have been
concerned with the building and upkeep of the*

GLORIOUS CATHEDRAL
CHURCH OF WELLS

*its Chapter House, its Lady Chapel,
and the incomparable*

VICARS' CLOSE

I Dedicate this Book



THE glory of this temple was not in the
bigness of it, for that alone was but
a small pile of building, the main grandeur
and excellency consisted in its ornaments,
its workmanship being everywhere exceeding
curious, and its overlayings rich and costly,
in its materials, being built of large stones
hewn out in the most artful manner, in its
outbuildings, which were large, beautiful
and sumptuous. But what still was the
main glory of this temple were those extra-
ordinary marks of the divine favour with
which it was honoured.

Author's Preface

It would be fatuous to pretend that the scene of this chronicle has not been laid, for the most part, in the ancient town of Wells; and it may be asked, not without reason, why not write Wells instead of "Fountains"? Any writer of fiction can answer a question which may puzzle the general reader. This is a work of imagination; the characters in it without exception are fictitious. More, although portraiture of places has been attempted, the author admits frankly that here and there he has strayed in pleasant vagabondage down the lanes of fancy, leaving the highways of fact, where it has suited his purpose to do so. Had he called "Fountains" Wells, as he was indeed tempted to do, he would have laid himself open to that harassing form of criticism which concerns itself with indicating trivial mistakes in topography. Nothing more need be said.

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PROLOGUE

Vicars' Walk

IN Fountains—that mediæval Wessex town which takes its name from the splendid springs (*Fontes*) to the south-east of the cathedral church—you will find Vicars' Walk, which is indeed a Vicars' Close, or college, linked by an exquisite bridge to the magnificent Chapter House, but not the property of Dean and Chapter. The history of this enchanting little backwater, set far from the ordinary traffics and excursions of life, is well known in Fountains. It was founded, towards the end of the fourteenth century, by a great and kindly bishop, whose alabaster effigy lies upon the top of his tomb in the cathedral church. It had come to this prelate's ears that his Vicars Choral had no place of fixed residence. There were, in all, about forty singing men (as they were called subsequently), and in the Walk you will see forty chimneys standing high above the houses. The actual chimneys may have been restored or replaced, but the original bases remain embellished by escutcheons. After the Reformation, Good Queen Bess granted a fresh charter to the Vicars which may be seen (by those interested in such ancient documents) in what used to be the refectory of the college, now serving as a library. This fine room is situate in a Gate House; and through a noble arch a visitor will espy delightedly an avenue of stone-built, miniature houses on a slight upward incline, with a gem of a chapel at the north end, making of the street a *cul-de-sac*.

Each house has its beautifully kept little garden in

Vicars' Walk

front of it. Originally, the Vicars Choral, being celibates, lived a communal life, and you can think of these tiny houses as bed chambers. After the Reformation the Vicars took unto themselves wives, and the houses were remodelled inside, although outwardly the Walk looks much as it did if you have imagination to envisage it without the present windows, many of which are Georgian.

Dr. Dyson, the dean, spoke of Vicars' Walk as Levites Row, because those who live in it are concerned with service in and about the cathedral church. To be given the tenancy of a house in the Walk is a *præmium diligentiae* awarded by the collegiate body. Upon the death of a Levite, his widow and children are, as a rule, permitted to remain on as tenants, a generous dispensation inasmuch as the beneficiaries—never regarded as Pensioners—may live to a great age.

Certain families in the Walk have been there for three or even four generations. Abel Saint, the senior verger (or Dean's Verger), was the son of another Abel Saint, also a verger. The Vyes, who occupy the house next to the Saints, established themselves in the Walk after the Napoleonic Wars. The Sumshions, cathedral stonemasons and also singing men, came to the Walk when the First Gentleman of Europe was building the Pavilion at Brighton. The Hiles, singing men, carpenters, and what not, claim pride of place as the oldest family, being lineally descended from one Peter Hiles, who had been steward to the Lord Bishop of Fountains when Queen Anne sat on her throne.

Accepting (with his sense of humour) the Dean's label, it is necessary to indicate the Levitical Law, whether written or unwritten, which governed alike the passivities and activities of the Levites in Vicars' Walk, before and up to the advent of the motor car.

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They were expected to lead decent, God-fearing lives. With rarest exceptions they did so. Even to-day there lingers in the Walk an atmosphere of tranquil content which defies loud speakers and motor horns. Before the war the change in conditions was hardly perceptible to the observant eye ; but it might be felt. For example, youth had begun to question *sotto voce* the wisdom of age. Youth dared not say all that it thought in the presence of age, but in secret it rebelled against too strict a discipline. The matrons, perhaps, were a thought more austere than the men, having a keener sense of possession. Observance of the law spelled for them security. When a girl married a Levite, she knew that, humanly speaking, she became immune from bad language and bad treatment. And, so far as her own conduct was concerned, she realised that it paid to be good. "Lead us not into temptation" was no empty phrase in Vicars' Walk. Mothers protected their daughters against the lusts of the flesh ; fathers took the rod to their sons if they kept loose company. To be sure the townspeople, the lesser breeds without the Law, scoffed at much which they were unable to understand. But the Levites, in the shadow of their splendid temple, standing shoulder to shoulder, kept themselves to themselves because all would be well within the sanctuary if the danger without was made plain to children not old enough to appreciate the amenities that would be theirs if—if they behaved themselves.

It is certain that the cathedral church exercised a tremendous influence over the Walk. It emphasised the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. More, it was the business of the Levites to know their temple, and to pass on that knowledge to others. Its beauty was continually on their lips. The Sumshions, being stonemasons, were at work on it or in it all the year round. Abel Saint and Joseph Vye were vergers ;

Vicars' Walk

Arthur Kerridge was the organist. During more than twenty years Ambrose Custard, the scrivener, had sung bass in the cathedral choir. But he was something of a note of interrogation, inasmuch as he had introduced to the Walk his granddaughter, Bessie, when she was ten years old. Nobody knew anything about Bessie's mother. The only son of Ambrose had left Fountains ostensibly to better himself. He had been accounted a bright lad, but not cut to pattern. Fountains never saw him again. Fountains forgot him. Old Ambrose must have been past sixty when he vanished, most mysteriously, and was absent for some three weeks. He came back with Bessie. Apparently he had undertaken the sole charge of a pretty little maid. The Dean cited Silas Marner aptly enough. Old Ambrose had turned, since the death of his wife, into a recluse, and really, since the general use of the typewriting machine, his occupation was almost gone; he was the last of the scriveners in Fountains. In answer to questions he said curtly that Bessie's parents were dead. However, the good gossips gleaned more information from the child. She prattled about her father who apparently had not been too successful as an actor. Nevertheless Bessie had the wardrobe of a gentleman's child; and she spoke as the quality speak. She couldn't remember her mother. Vicars' Walk was upset and baffled. Old Ambrose refused to enlighten curiosity which exhausted itself in idle speculation. There had been one tit-bit, if you can call it that. Mrs. Vye, the mother of four daughters, would have mothered Bessie had she received any encouragement from old Ambrose. To Mrs. Vye Bessie had made this startling announcement:

"My Mum was a real lady."

That—and no more, not one corroborative detail.

Vicars' Walk discussed this from every point of

Prologue

view. In 1904 Fountains was still far from the beaten track, not easily accessible either by road or rail. There wasn't a woman, old or young, in the Walk who would have spoken of herself as a lady. Mrs. Vye, for one, believed Bessie after careful inspection of her underlinen. Being a sensible woman, she had taken upon herself to warn the child :

" Yes, dear, but I wouldn't say so here, if I was you. Sounds like bragging, don't it ? If you look and behave like a little lady, your dear mother, if she were alive, would be ever so pleased."

Bessie had nodded and smiled intelligently.

Under the firm conviction that strolling actors were rogues and vagabonds, the Walk agreed that the less said about Bessie's parents the better. It was further agreed that the reticences of Ambrose Custard must be respected.

Book One

*Alas ! They had been friends in youth ;
But whispering tongues can poison truth,
And constancy lives in realms above ;
And life is thorny and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like poison in the brain.*



The Gate House.

CHAPTER ONE
Concerning Enoch Saint

I

ENOCH SAINT, when he was a chorister in Fountains cathedral, spoke of Dean Dyson as his friend. This amused many persons, because Mr. Dean, both to the observant and unobservant, appeared to be a formidable personage, tall, thin, pale, and austere, a sometime famous scholar but without the scholar's stoop. The Lord Bishop of Fountains, round and rosy, cut no figure in the presence of Mr. Dean; and it was said by the townspeople, good West country gossips, that the autocrat of the Close had the last word upon everything affecting the diocese, even as he reigned supreme over the Chapter. Enoch, as a boy, astounded other boys by affirming that the Dean, had he lived before the days of Richard Whiting, the last abbot of Glastonbury, would have been a cardinal and just such another prince of the church as Richelieu. Enoch, being the only son of the senior verger, could talk of bishops, deans, abbots and cardinals without being kicked. He could also talk (and did) about Gothic architecture, when other boys were discussing batting averages. It is significant, although hardly credible, that Enoch, regarded as "hopeless" at games, had achieved a sort of leadership by exercise of his wits. Perhaps his voice had established him at a pre-kickable age as one of the wonders of Fountains. The Dean had then said of him: "*Vox—et præterea nihil.*" At the time, even a proud mother might have wondered what would be left if you took away that heavenly, sexless voice which seemed to

Vicars' Walk

float down out of the fan-vaulting of the chancel, as if it were a benediction from the throne of God, and to drift across the Close, carrying farther (by reason of its incomparable quality) than the robust tenors and deep, full-throated basses. When this *voix céleste* was first heard, strangers stared with troubled eyes at a diminutive figure as savages might stare at a gramophone. They expected to see an angel boy; they beheld instead, a pallid imp, all eyes and mouth, who surely would never live to be a man. And that—if the gossips could be believed—had excited the interest of the Dean and whetted, possibly, a determination on his part to defeat the gentleman with the scythe. Anyway, Enoch was taken to London by the Dean, who paid expenses, and was examined by half a dozen doctors, who found serious glandular trouble which, in due time, yielded to treatment. Six months later he was not too noticeably different from other boys of his age.

In 1914, Enoch was functioning as "odd man" in and about the cathedral. He did clerical work for the Dean; he labelled himself typist and stenographer; he could repair ancient tomes; he had acquired an out-of-the-way knowledge of the cathedral, and he was regarded by all and sundry as an obliging, industrious, and accomplished person, who, had he been the son of a county magnate, might have gone far on any road.

Some three or four months before the declaration of war, he fell in love with Felicity Vye, the daughter of Joseph Vye, second-in-command to Abel Saint, Enoch's father. The two families were on the best of terms and minded their manners as carefully as they tended their small gardens which were the prettiest in the Walk. The Sumshions lived on the other side of the street next door to Ambrose Custard, the scrivener. Higher up, to the left of the chapel,

Concerning Enoch Saint

was the biggest house, tenanted by Arthur Kerridge, the organist. Kerridge might have been a prosperous publican. His father owned a famous tavern, The Open Arms, which he proposed to bequeath to his elder son, the organist. However, nobody connected with the Close was surprised when Arthur Kerridge, after his father's death, refused to leave Vicars' Walk. His younger brother, Alfred, stepped nimbly into the business and doubled "takings" by methods not altogether approved by Arthur. The inn became a popular house of call, because a huge sign—two huge signs, fore and aft—advertised "OMELETTES." Throughout the West country these omelettes became as alluring as those of Madame Poulard, at Mont Saint Michel. Credit for no mean achievement must be given to Alfred's wife, half a Frenchwoman. She made the buttery omelettes and ruled well and wisely over the kitchen.

Felicity Vye was a simple maid, likely to become as plump as her mother, pretty enough, but very prim, and properly under the thumb of her father. She regarded Enoch with affection having known him all her life. He had taught her to spin a top in top-time and to play marbles. Nobody in Fountains, except Felicity, knew that Enoch had taken interest in her dolls, weaving blood-curdling stories about them. Any secret between a boy and a girl is a bond of union. Felicity had little imagination; Enoch had too much. The games with the dolls would have tickled the grim humour of the Dean, had he been present, behind the arras, when the children were alone together. Each doll suffered from some mysterious complaint. It was dreadful, perfectly heartrending, but they did not respond to treatment. Two (the cheapest) died and were buried. Enoch read the service over them; Felicity shed real tears, because somehow, intuitionally, she felt sure that Enoch was saying "dust to dust"

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over himself. This was long before the wonderful visit to London. But afterwards, when the boy shot up into a thin, lanky, sallow-faced youth, he went on making up thrilling tales which had a regional tang to them. For example, he concocted half a dozen stories about the Glastonbury Thorn, at Weary-all Hill, where St. Joseph of Arimathea had thrust his staff into the ground. Enoch's father, the senior verger, told to pilgrims and trippers the legend of the wicked man who attempted to fell the Holy Thorn; whereupon his axe slipped and cut his leg, and a chip flew into his eye and blinded him. Enoch by this time had acquired what the Dean called a diction. He was nice in his use of English, disdaining the dialect used by town boys. It was understood in Vicars' Walk that Enoch would be a verger and carry a verge. Felicity's mother, the most voluble woman in Fountains, said so in no uncertain tones. Before he was sixteen Enoch had begun to understudy his father, and on one notable occasion (to the indignation of Mr. Vye) had taken round a party of Americans who tipped him handsomely. Secretly Abel Saint chuckled over this, but Mr. Vye spoke of Enoch as a "scab," a snapper-up of sixpences ear-marked for his elders and betters.

2

Falling in love with Felicity was a great and alarming experience for a young man painfully shy and miserably aware of his physical disabilities. Girls giggled at sight of Enoch, making fun of his patronymic. They knew him as "young Saint," who had lost his awe-inspiring voice, who had ceased to be a wonder child, and was girlish in his ways and tastes. But, oddly enough, Enoch retained his ascendancy over boys.

Concerning Enoch Saint

They were dimly and dumbly aware that he was different from them. Possibly another reason can be assigned. Alf Kerridge, the son of the publican and the nephew of the organist, two or three years older than Enoch, was known to be Enoch's friend and protector. Alf was a big, hulking, red-faced youth redeemed from the commonplace by the tincture of Gallic blood in his veins. He strutted about, a young Johnnie Bull in appearance. In his head and heart lurked Jacques Bonhomme. Enoch admired Alf enormously; the more so because Vicars' Walk predicted that Alf would come to no good end. Alf now and again disturbed the peace of his uncle, the organist, another friend of Enoch's, who had crushed Alf for at least five minutes by saying acidulously: "Enoch Saint is worth a baker's dozen of such louts as you." The ordinary lout of fifteen would have resented this, but Alf was intermittently intelligent. He had never ceased wondering why Uncle Artie had remained an ill-paid organist when he might have been a prosperous licensed victualler? Alf's father said that Uncle Artie was brainy, with a dash of "the quality" about him. In the Kerridge family, Uncle Artie was held to be a sound adviser in time of trouble.

Unhappily, as events turned out, Enoch was far too shy to speak of Felicity to Alf, or anybody else. He might have confided in his sister, Judith, who made a tremendous fuss over him; but she was five years older than himself and most astonishingly married to a London tailor. Her swift courtship and marriage had delighted Enoch. So romantic—! Between Romeo and Juliet, Enoch played go-between. How he had loved his part! When Romeo appeared in Fountains, carrying the knapsack of the pedestrian, he was stepping into a town set so far from the highways of ordinary travel that it looked mediæval and was,

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in every sense of the word, eighteenth century. Charabancs wrought a disconcerting change after the war, but even to-day Fountains has the enchanting air of the past ; it is still tranquil ; it distils a subtle fragrance like *potpourri* ; it makes any traveller think of staying on awhile, taking his ease at his inn, sleeping sound o' nights and dreaming by day. It was thus with Romeo. He drifted into the cathedral to see the six-hundred-year-old clock ; he heard Enoch sing. Half an hour later he had engaged the boy in talk ; and then Judith Saint joined them. Enoch never forgot the breathless excitement of what followed. The pair paired at sight ! They made no attempt to hide from Enoch a common attraction. Judith, so it transpired afterwards, dared not be seen talking with a stranger in the sacrosanct Close. Enoch, to be sure, served conveniently as the third who makes company possible and respectable. Moreover Romeo had urban assurance so fascinating to country maids, and a wit of his own. How he wooed Juliet must be set down briefly, because his *technique* impressed so tremendously a boy of thirteen beginning to feel joyously convinced that life might hold for him something more than singing and suffering. Glancing at Enoch, this "hiker" said suddenly :

"Would you like to tell your sister what a humble wayfarer thinks of her?"

Judith blushed ; Enoch nodded, agape with surprise.

"I think, my dear young nightingale, that your sister, who can put her fingers into her ears if she likes, is to me what the Rose of Torridge was to Amyas Leigh. I'm sure that you have read *Westward Ho!*" Enoch said that he had. "I carry with me that and *Lorna Doone*. I'm on my way to Bideford ; but here and now I swear to stay on in Fountains, if your sister will grant me a special grace. Take her aside and plead for me. She must be made to understand that

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I hold her in the highest respect. I dare not say to her what I say to you. Am I too indiscreet? Am I behaving like the common or garden cad? Be frank. You sing like Philomel, sing my little song to her. Will she meet me here, with you, to-morrow?"

Both Judith and Enoch laughed, as well they might. Never had either listened to such high-falutin' talk. And yet it flowed naturally enough from the lips of a knight of the road, treading the same road trod by thousands of gentlemen adventurers before him. Both girl and boy made certain that he was gentle and kind in his dealings. He had the beaming eye of the Laughing Cavalier; he was slenderly built, rejoicing in high health and spirits; he might be any age between twenty-five and thirty. Although he spoke to the brother, he glanced roguishly at the sister. She answered him demurely enough:

"We don't even know your name, sir. I am Judith Saint, the daughter of the senior verger."

"I am John Wintle, the son of a snip, a tailor. George Meredith was no more at my age. Wintle and Son. I am the son, a junior partner, Miss Saint, in a snug business situate in the West End of London. I have passed my tape over the paunch of a prince of the Blood Royal. We specialise in sporting suits. Freedom of movement—plenty of play beneath the arms, but withal *cut*, a modish style. Do I advertise our wares? Is my soft homespun to your fancy?"

He was certainly irresistible to Judith and Enoch. This beginning led straight to the altar, but Enoch was a party to and often a witness of the love-making. The parents knew nothing of what was going on under their noses, till Judith displayed an engagement ring. She had what is termed to-day a "hunch" that father, always the man with the verge, might spoil the fun of the fair. Mother, of course, would side with

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him. Eventually youth triumphed, Abel Saint (and Vicars' Walk) surrendered conditionally. *What would Mr. Wintle senior say?* Mr. Wintle—at first sight of Judy—pronounced a benediction.

3

Whether or not Judy would have acclaimed little Felicity Vye as a future sister-in-law is not worth considering. Enoch had a distressing conviction that Judy might scoff at calf love. That was what his father would call it. And Mrs. Vye would exclaim: "Stuff and nonsense." Had the Dean been a thoughtless austere, Enoch would have gone to him. Considering such a visit with what detachment he could compass, it seemed certain that Mr. Dean would say, with a dry chuckle: "Yes, yes, my boy, but does Felicity care for you?" Did she? That corroding question obtruded itself. Felicity had been sweet to him always. She was now barely seventeen, blushing conscious that young men turned their heads to glance at her as she tripped by. The more Enoch considered John's dashing methods, the more miserably conscious he became of his own inhibitions and hesitations. Judith had never been prim; Judith knew what she wanted. But Felicity had the air of repeating piously: "Whatever I am about to receive may the Lord make me truly thankful." That, more or less, was a tradition in Vicars' Walk, and an emanation from the Close, where wives of Canons and Minor Canons laid down the law to women of lesser degree. Felicity had been trained to present a bright and cheerful countenance in fair weather or foul. When she was five years old she knew that a smile might mean sixpence. The children in the Walk kept on tap a sunny smile for American visitors, who would

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exclaim : " My ! • Here it seems to be summertime all the time."

Long afterwards Enoch attempted to measure his passion for Felicity. Passion it was, a mad ungovernable urge to have and to hold her. But it was difficult to imagine her sharing this passion. Surely she would shrink from it ashamed and abashed as became a modest maid. And if he tried to ape John Wintle, he would make himself ridiculous. Finally he embalmed some of his emotions in a sonnet, which Felicity described as " sweetly pretty." She suggested that it might be printed, that it might even be paid for. Enoch said hastily :

" It's for you ; I wrote it for you. Don't show it to anybody."

" You are a oner to think of things."

This was non-committal, uttered without a blush. Desperately Enoch plunged.

" Alf Kerridge said the other day that a woman always knew when a man was in love with her."

" Alf said that."

" Yes."

" I—I suppose Alf plays about with half a dozen girls."

" When boys like Alf talk about girls, I hate to listen. It just cheapens everything."

Felicity nodded.

" Does it ? I suppose Alf is—well, you know. Does he talk to you about his conquests ?"

" I should be sick if he did."

" Mother has warned me against Alf," continued Felicity. " All the same I should like to hear his lordship talking about women."

" No, you wouldn't."

" I know I should die of laughing. Course, he knows more than you do, Enie ; he's such a naughty boy, and certain, so Mum says, to turn into a bold,

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bad man. Even now he kisses and tells—! Perfectly hateful! As we're talking about Alf I do think that if you think anything of me you might see less of him."

"All right. But Alf would say that you know what I feel about you."

"P'raps I do, and p'raps I don't. Are you in love with me, dear?"

"Yes, I am—madly."

She shot an appraising glance at him, half-smiling.

"You want to—to marry me?"

"Fee, I'm crazy for you. Look here, if—if you don't love me as I love you, it will come. May I give you a true lover's kiss?"

Felicity glanced about her. As children she and Enoch had kissed *coram populo*. As yet no lover had kissed her.

"You mustn't be rough," she warned him.

Tenderly, reverentially, Enoch laid his lips upon hers, surprised and touched because she yielded so easily. Perhaps she had always cared—as he cared. Presently, she hid her face on his shoulder still clinging to him, but saying nothing. He hoped that she was blushing, but she wasn't. To his surprise she said calmly:

"Enie, let's talk everything over. You are the dearest boy in the world, and I'm sure I love you to distraction, but, oh, my! where are we?"

They were in a coign of great vantage, reasonably secure from haphazard interruption, screened from prying eyes of Tom or Tabby, encompassed by walls seven feet thick, in a room lighted by two lancet windows, the top room of the ancient Gate House. Stone stairs led to this oak-panelled parlour where both Felicity and Enoch worked very much when and how they pleased; for this was the library of the Close. Felicity earned a little extra pin-money by keeping it

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in order ; Enoch was the librarian. The parlour was open to certain churchpeople at certain hours. Here they could read or write, suitable stationery being provided. There were many volumes both ancient and modern. It was a labour of love to Enoch to keep the books in order. Had Mrs. Vye or Mrs. Saint mounted the stone stairs, the otherwise rather startling fact of finding their children alone and together would have excited no comment. Nevertheless, till quite recently, Felicity had done her work early in the morning, whereas Enoch, who was on duty elsewhere from ten to one, did his work early in the afternoon. After five the library was open to the privileged few.

4

Felicity, with virginal nods and smiles, endeavoured to explain *where* they were from another point of view. Enoch believed her to be a sensible little dear ; he had never thought of her as worldly-wise, having yet to learn that even flappers of the lower middle class are confoundingly alert where their interests are at stake. In cool, temperate tones, Felicity summed up their joint ages as well under thirty-seven ; she asked Enoch if he was in a position to support a wife in a tone suggesting (even to Enoch) that babies were a never-failing crop in Fountains ; she indicated parental objections on both sides and her sad conviction that a long engagement would be frowned upon. None the less, when she finished talking, she held up her lips to be kissed.

Finally, the maid, not the man, imposed secrecy, and had her way. She was sharp enough to point out that John and Judy, with Enoch's whole-souled co-operation, had met and loved in secret. What a spice to Cupid's

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dish ! Beguiled by Felicity's soft lips, Enoch dared not reply that John was old enough to marry and rich enough to support a wife. He suppressed, too, his knowledge that the parents on both sides trusted *him*. No other young man in Fountains was allowed to be alone with Felicity. Before they parted Felicity said significantly :

" Enie, I'm going to be most awfully ambitious for you."

He smiled faintly. Felicity went on :

" You might have been a great singer——"

Enoch winced beneath a deadly thrust. No less a personage than the Precentor, a Canon and a fine musician, had said that young Saint had the makings of a famous tenor. After his treble voice broke that hope was shattered. When he began to use his vocal chords again quality had gone from them, a bitter disappointment. Ever since his ambition, if it can be called that, soared no higher than the twin towers of the cathedral. He wanted to remain a servant in a great house of God.

" I—I didn't mean to remind you of that," she continued, " but you're so clever. You might become a gentleman, if you took Orders."

" Took Orders ? "

" Well, why shouldn't you ? "

Enoch smiled at her. She spoke of taking Orders as if it were on all fours with taking a cup of tea or the King's Shilling.

" You might end up a bishop, and be called ' my lord '. How I'd love to be a bishop's wife ! "

" Now, Fee, are you ambitious for me or for yourself ? "

" If you laugh at me," she pouted, " I shall be very cross. I want to be proud of you. When I look at your mother and mine I don't someway see myself as a verger's wife."

Concerning ENOCH SUMM

Enoch was puzzled but not offended. Indeed his attitude towards Felicity had changed during the past blessed half hour. He beheld her as his, inalienably his. That, of course, was a fundamental mistake. Older and wiser persons than he have made it, and will go on making it, till there is a consensus of opinion that there can be no proprietary claim exercised by one individual over another, not even—to press the point perhaps unduly—between mother and child. However, Enoch was intelligent enough to make allowance for Felicity's ambitions. He was pleased to discover that she was ambitious. Perhaps Dean Dyson—most assuredly not his own people—had purged his mind of any taint of snobbery. He had smiled inwardly at Felicity's use of that resilient word *gentleman*. It is significant that nobody in Vicars' Walk would have spoken of Felicity as a young lady. The bishop's butler, had she called at the Palace, would have announced her as a young person. But, the Walk, speaking collectively, would have been unanimous in declaring that any deacon in Holy Orders had the right to dub himself gentleman. More, if he married a young person, she would rise automatically to his social level.

"You don't see yourself as a verger's wife," he repeated.

"Enie, it's so deadly dull here. I never dared say so before, not even to you, but it is. Aren't you dull sometimes? What have you looked forward to? Tell me."

"You——"

"Me? Gracious!"

"I have thought of little else, Fee. Suppose I did take Orders? What would be my position? Here at any rate I should be looked down on as a ranker. I might begin and end a curate, earning less than my father does. He has no position to

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keep up. Honestly, I would sooner be a bricklayer than a curate, unless——”

“Unless?”

“Unless,” he repeated with slight constraint, “the call came to me.”

He stopped abruptly, because he could see that he was talking over a pretty little head. Calls mean nothing to sweet seventeen.

“Why shouldn’t you become a great writer?”

Her belief in his cleverness was pathetic.

“Well, sweetheart, I have spoken to the Dean about that. He writes, and he told me with that twisted smile of his how very little he made. Also he warned me that I should have to serve a long apprenticeship granting that I had aptitudes——”

“Enie, you do talk so lovely; I’m sure you’re nearly as clever as Mr. Dean, and far cleverer than his lordship. I—I love you ’cos you are so clever; and I say, and others say, that you are wasted here in this dull old town. Why shouldn’t you go to London? Your brother-in-law might give you a position. Hasn’t your sister ever talked to you about that? She’s quite the lady. My! When she came down last Christmas, she was the smartest thing in Fountains.”

“If I left Fountains,” said Enoch slowly, “I should leave you.”

“But if you were going ahead I shouldn’t mind that, not a bit. I could wait, as other girls have waited.”

A minute later she had to leave him. It was hastily agreed that it would be too heavenly to meet secretly for the next few weeks or so. Obviously the sometime refectory, high up, approached by stone stairs, had been divinely appointed for such a purpose.

When she kissed him good-bye, she whispered:

“I’m a good girl, Enie. I’ve never thought of

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any man but you. I hate the rough town boys. Yes, I'm good; and you're clever. Between us we just ought to get somewhere."

She flitted away with a backward glance, wafting a last kiss to him as she passed through the door.

5

As soon as he was alone Enoch thanked God for this great gift of a good girl. He didn't fall on his knees, because the Dean—to the dismay of some constant communicants—had spoken disdainfully of lip service and genuflections. Mr. Dean was, perhaps, at his best when conducting a children's service. He talked with them, never at them; he walked about as he talked. Enoch had a vivid memory of a hot afternoon when some small fat girl fell asleep. Her mother was about to wake her, but the Dean put his finger to his lip, moved away, and went on speaking in a lower tone. Enoch could also recall an injunction frequently repeated: "I would sooner you thought your prayers than said them," or, with a reassuring twinkle in his eyes, "Try to invent new prayers. Don't you think that God must get rather tired of hearing the same thing said over and over again?"

Having thanked God after a fashion which Mr. Dean would have commended, Enoch went on with his work, attempting not very successfully to forget Felicity's clinging arms and lips and to concentrate upon what she had said. He couldn't escape the conclusion that a good girl who had known him all her life, and who was now part and parcel of his life regarded him as a drudge——! With sudden illumination he linked Judy with Felicity. Till that moment it had never occurred to him that his own sister, who

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had responded so swiftly and ardently to the enterprising John Wintle, might have seen in John apart from his attractive personality, the first and perhaps the only opportunity to escape from Fountains. After leaving Fountains Judy had become another creature. Vicars' Walk said that she had married the right man. That jumped to the eye. During her first visit, before her first child was born, when she rushed down alone for a too brief week-end, she had chattered gaily about London; but Enoch was then too young to ask her outright if she preferred London to Fountains. Ten minutes after Felicity left him, Enoch was quite certain that Judy had been dull in Fountains. The Vyes and the Saints, for generations, had lived and died in this wonderful old town. They loved it, even if they were unable to express love in words; they deemed themselves blest because they did not live in Bristol.

Suddenly, Enoch experienced an odd wish to survey Fountains, to—to take stock of it, so to speak, as a panoramic whole. Quite impossible to do this through a lancet window; but he had leisure, if he so pleased, for a brisk walk before evening closed in. It was light now till eight in mid-April.

At five the library was open to its limited public. Up to the end of April it remained open till seven. At seven Enoch descended the stone stairs and passed into the Close. He stood still for a moment, conscious of the overwhelming dominance of the cathedral. It dwarfed everything else save the Bishop's Palace, really a feudal castle encircled by a moat upon which some swans glided hither and thither, pausing to ring a bell if they felt in need of refreshment. Enoch was on the friendliest terms with the swans. Now and again a swan flew away. Why? The moat was a sanctuary to coots, ducks and other water birds seemingly content with Fountains. Overhead

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the rooks cawed in the elms. A robber rook, pilfering twigs from another's nest, was expelled from the community. But did rooks of their own free will leave Fountains? He was not knowledgeable enough about the habits of birds to answer this question. Thinking about rooks suggested the black-coated clergy. He remembered that the Dean had refused a bishopric. Fountains, and in particular Vicars' Walk, had expressed satisfaction not surprise.

Enoch strolled as far as the bowling-green which would be open to bowlers on the first of May. It was now in apple-pie order, absolutely level, a sheet of richest emerald. The most famous bowler was over seventy years of age; he had bowled for half a century!

And then—was it sheer coincidence or not?—Enoch espied this patriarch gazing lovingly and critically at the green. Salutations were exchanged.

"Have you ever left Fountains?" asked Enoch.

The oldest bowler answered querulously, as if rebuking a thoughtless youth for asking a silly question.

"Leave Fountains? I've a-lived here-along, man and boy, for more'n seventy year. I've a-bin to Lunnon town once—and never wanted to go again. Leave Fountains—? God A'mighty—whatever for?"

CHAPTER TWO

Miss, Mrs. and Mr. Vye

I

TAKING courteous leave of the oldest bowler in Fountains, Enoch pulled from his pocket a pipe and filled it. He rationed himself with tobacco, fearing abuse of one of the best of God's good creatures.

The Dean had observed to Enoch, who made mental note of his quips, that fat men should move delicately down hill; otherwise they might run away with themselves. The parable of the Gadarene swine suggested uncontrolled excess speed. It was a temptation to Enoch to smoke too much. However, the nature of his duties imposed abstentions. But, before he fell in love with Felicity, he nourished a tender passion for Nicotina. Throughout the long mornings he would yearn for his pipe, amazedly aware of a hankering after forbidden fruit, a hankering to be, of course, repressed. Once, in an explosive moment, he had said to Alf Kerridge, "You know, Alf, when I sit and think about myself, I am no longer myself." What was Gallic in Alf tried to cope with this. Finally Enoch explained that Original Sin, or whatever you liked to call it, rampaged when he allowed his mind to dwell on it. Alf, incapable of resisting any temptation, understood that God's grace—and that alone—prevented a quondam chorister from degenerating into a liar, a thief, and even a murderer—! After pledging Alf to secrecy, Enoch confessed that he had aptitudes for lying; he could hear himself lying superbly, *splendide mendax*; he could see himself as a successful burglar, a sort of

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Raffles ; he could thrill with excitement, after killing his man in a duel. The Dean, certainly not Alf, might have accounted for these imaginary moral lapses, from which a chorister should have recoiled in horror. The Dean, grim humorist, might have guessed that a series of *don'ts* had misgoverned Enoch whereas a series of *do's* had animated young Alf. Alf lied impudently ; Alf robbed orchards ; Alf smote and spared not ; Alf refused to join the Boy Scouts, because—so he told Enoch—he preferred to do a bad deed every day !

Filling his pipe and lighting it, Enoch turned his back on the Close, and began to ascend the wooded hill to the east of the town. From the top of this Fountains and the vale stretching towards Severn's silver sea could be seen to perfection. Enoch was sure that Saint Joseph of Arimathea would have planted the Holy Thorn on this hill had he known of it. King Ina, who built a Saxon church in honour of Saint Andrew, must have stood where Enoch stood surveying the champagne beneath. His church was of wood. The Normans introduced stone. But, during eight centuries, the cathedral had been slowly built by many hands. Abel Saint talked about it to Enoch as soon as the boy was old enough to listen. And much of its wonderful history was illustrated by innumerable sculptures on the West Front. On summer evenings Abel Saint would point out the more important figures : kings, nobles and churchmen. At the time the senior verger may have thought that the boy would never live to carry a verge, but, if he did, intimate knowledge of and love for this resplendent fane would surely secure for him a place in it. Before he was ten Enoch believed that his father had been sanctified by long service in this house of God. So the infant Samuel may have regarded Eli. Abel Saint, a hard, narrow-minded,

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narrow-headed disciplinarian, a stickler for the letter of the law, something too of a pincher, a reactionary, of course, a bit of a snob, was a true lover of the beauty that endures in stone. That love he transmitted to his son.

Enoch wished to behold Fountains panoramically ; but the Dean could have told him that here was one of those exceptional towns where a part is incomparably greater than the whole. Enoch's thoughts lingered on and in the cathedral. He remembered that one bishop had left it. Another bishop, living elsewhere, had died leaving instructions that his body was to be buried beneath the high altar. And that, according to the Dean, had led to the rehabilitation of Fountains.

Having climbed a hill to survey his birthplace, Enoch, for at least a quarter of an hour, could not take his eyes off the cathedral. When he did they rested upon Vicars' Walk.

He let his pipe go out thinking of Felicity.

2

She had imposed secrecy upon him. Nevertheless, before his kisses were cold on her lips, she was seized with an irresistible desire to put into words thoughts jostling each other in her small pate. In the Walk there flourished an unwritten law among young girls observed by the majority of marriageable maids who live in that genteel suburb which, socially speaking, lies between domestic service and the independence of the well-to-do. It was a stigma, in Felicity's judgment, to marry any man—regardless of physical attributes—who could not offer (and provide) a position at least equal to that of her own parents. The right man "went one better."

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Felicity, slightly flushed, scampered home to find her mother alone. Mrs. Vye was always glad to welcome old friends. Invariably she entreated them to stay on. "Why hurry?" fell plaintively from her pleasant lips. She was of kin to dozens of persons in and about Fountains, with "Ever so pleased to see you" inscribed upon her comely, good-natured face. Being a lady with a *façade*, a sprightly Gaul might have said of her: "*trop de balcon*". Still, Mrs. Vye carried her *embonpoint* with an air—The Personal Deity whom she saw as taking a paternal and proprietary interest in Vicars' Walk had denied to Mrs. Vye male offspring. A grievance this, shortly to be regarded as a blessing when it became certain that every able-bodied male would be called upon to serve King and Country. She had brought into this world four girls. Three had married tradesmen. Felicity remained her ewe lamb. She had another grievance, which she dared not mention. A voluble talker, too voluble (so her neighbours thought), she resented interruptions. She loved irrelevancies; she couldn't tell a straight story without divagations. Mr. Vye and her daughters would then ruthlessly "cut in", damming the babbling rivulet.

"Where have you been, child?"

"Cleaning up in Gate House."

Felicity sat down, aware that her cheeks betrayed a too warm damask, which might provoke questions. Happily, Mum seldom waited for questions to be answered. She preferred to answer them herself.

"I don't hold with p.m. cleanings-up. It was never done in my time. Except on Sundays I used to get your grandfather a cup o' tea at seven a.m. and take it to him in bed. He fancied feather beds, which I never could abide. My mother made her own feather beds. We collected feathers, made a nice useful hobby of it. I don't deny that a reel,

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old-fashioned feather bed is a comfort on cold winter nights. But in summer time——! And, even in them ancient days, when I was just such a slip of a girl as you are, and bathed my cheeks in morning dew, and believed in fairies and what not, I used to perspire that easily that—— ”

“ Mum ? ”

“ Yes ? ”

“ Any visitors this afternoon ? ”

“ Only your sister, Unity. Popped in and popped out again. I don't hold with that. So flickety-flackety. My mother used to say: ‘ If you can't bide a bit, why sit down at all ? ’ Very quick with her tongue, Mother was, and—— ”

“ Did Unity have any news ? ”

“ That she did. I may as well tell you. She's expecting next September. Well, they can afford one more. As she seemed to be asking for a word o' cheer, I told her that she might be worse employed, particularly now Eustace can afford extry help, and I added that she could count on you.”

Felicity frowned and fidgeted. It was humanly certain that Unity would send for her. Then history would repeat itself; she would play nurse-maid and maid of all work.

“ I call it chronic,” she murmured.

“ What do you say ? And what do you mean ? ”

“ This baby business makes me so cross. I'm fed up with it. If that's all there is to holy matrimony, I'd sooner remain single. I don't care what you say, Unity is now no good for anything else. If she isn't having a baby, she's feeding it; and if she isn't feeding it she has it on her lap talking baby-talk, and that's about all she does do. And, as usual, I shall be asked to step round and oblige. Enough——and more than enough, but Unity and you and Father think that I like helping, and I loathe it.”

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Mrs. Vye was inexpressibly shocked. How could she cope with this outburst, so—so unmaidenly, so unfeeling, and so utterly unexpected? Never, never had a young girl thus delivered herself in Vicars' Walk. One might expect something of the sort from acidulous, cantankerous old maids, yes, but where had a mere child picked up such ideas? She held up a plump hand.

"It's a mercy your dear father isn't here——"

"I wouldn't speak about babies before any man. Mayn't I say what I think to my own mother?"

"It's so dreadful that you should think such things, Reelly I don't know what to say to you. Your dear sisters are good Christian wives and mothers, doing their duty. I'm proud of them; so is your father. Did I tell you of a lady who lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth? No; come to think of it 'twas Bloody Mary. She lived to see more than three hundred descendants of her own body——"

"Mum, she didn't."

"Don't you have the impudence to contradict me. She did."

"Queen Bloody Mary married the son of Charles V, afterwards Philip II of Spain. She had no children at all, not one."

"And who said she did, Miss? I didn't send you to High School to show off before your own mother. This lady I'm telling you about lived in Kent, no Essex. She died when she was ninety-six. Now why shouldn't I live to see my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The more the merrier, say I. It's blasphemious to talk about babies the way you do."

"All right; all right. You said that Unity wanted a word of cheer. If it's such a blessed privilege to have a baby once a year, why should she be down in the dumps about it?"

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"There are reasons," rejoined Mrs. Vye austere-ly, "which I'm not going to discuss with a chit like you. You'll know more about it in God's good time. You have upset me. I'm wondering what young girls are coming to and what they'll say next. Your sisters are happy. Do you deny that, Miss?"

Felicity said simply:

"Perhaps they are, Mum. I don't know; nobody knows. What I say is that their lives seem dreadfully dull to me, but then to my notions this funny old town *is* dull. You can't get away from it."

Whether it was impossible to escape from Fountains or from a silly child's conclusion about it, Mrs. Vye was unable to determine. She was quivering like a jelly and wondering whether or not Felicity needed a dose of castor oil. Her liver must be out of order. But critical inspection of the girl's blooming cheeks and clear bright eyes put this conjecture out of court.

"Show me your tongue."

Felicity displayed a dimple, as she thrust out a little tongue in the pink of condition. Baffled but not beaten Mrs. Vye hazarded another guess.

"My daughter never got such ideas out of her own head. You've been talking, I'll be bound, with one o' they suffragettes."

During the preceding month of March militant suffragettes had burnt down a house near Fountains to the indignation of the whole county. About the same time half a dozen young females marched into the Close on a Sunday morning and distributed pamphlets to the townspeople as they were walking into the cathedral. One minx dared to sit in the seat habitually used by Mrs. Vye, who promptly dealt with her "Is your name Mrs. Vye?" she asked. "Oh, it isn't. Well, mine is—and *this* is my seat." A pert baggage replied: "Pardon me! This seat belongs to the cathedral and is free." The wife of a

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verger so far forgot herself, and where she was, that she said savagely, dropping an aitch: "Not 'arf so free as you are, Miss Impudence." This regrettable incident had discoloured Mrs. Vye's views concerning the modern miss. She continued reproachfully:

"Knowing, as you do, what I think o' them, you did ought to keep away from such disgraces."

"I haven't spoken to any suffragette."

"Don't you try to deceive me. You own up where you picked up these ideas."

Felicity did so, having a card up her sleeve which she proposed to play immediately.

"Enoch Saint put these ideas as you call 'em, into my head."

Mrs. Vye gasped.

"I don't believe it; I can't believe it."

The artful Felicity played her card.

"Enoch thinks as you do, Mum. We had a talk about it. I got the idea that Fountains was a dull old place, because Enoch is so sure it isn't. I shocked him as I've shocked you, 'cos I sort of hinted that Judith had snapped up Mr. Wintle in a hurry, feeling, may be, that she couldn't miss a grand chance to see a bit of life in London."

"*You* said that to Enoch Saint?"

"That, or something like it."

"Go on. What happened next?"

"Enoch was quite nice, but you see he's clever. I daresay he didn't want to be unkind to me, 'cos we've always been friends. What do you think of Enoch, Mum?"

Mrs. Vye, completely hoodwinked, much relieved to find that Enoch stood shoulder to shoulder with herself, spoke—as Felicity wished her to speak—most handsomely of young Saint. He was wise beyond his years; he had never caused his dear mother a moment's anxiety apart from his health;

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he might be a person of importance some day, if it was true that old Saint had saved a nice bit of money; he was a Churchman; he hadn't an idle bone in his body; and she, the speaker, ending upon D. in Alt, said that had God Almighty seen fit to send her such a son, she would have accounted herself blessed.

Felicity listened, dimpling with pleasure. She had wanted this, craved for this as Enoch craved for a soothing pipe. Father would see eye to eye with Mum. All the same, both Father and Mum would be frustrated if they heard of any love-making. Judith had been ever so wise about that.

But how refreshing and reassuring to hear Mum praising Enoch so sincerely!

"If he was your son, Mum, would you want him to be a verger?"

"Dear, dear! What questions you do ask! I've never been one to put beggars on horseback. I mean to say, dear, that I am, and always have been, content in my station of life. Vergers are so respectable."

"Are they respectable because they'd lose their job if they weren't?"

"You mustn't talk like that except with me. When your father became a verger, I accepted him——"

"'Cos he was a verger?"

"Felicity——!"

"Pardon! But may be you felt it was safe to marry a verger. Has a verger ever beaten his wife and taken to drink?"

"Never in our cathedral—so far as I know. I kept company with your father before he was a verger, but we weren't properly engaged. My mother thought it was a big thing for me to marry a verger; so did I. But, as you know, I'd been in service; and I walked out with a second footman, a very nice

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respectable young fellow with curly hair. My mother was against my marrying any man in service. Well, where was I? Oh, yes. I did know, young and giddy as I was then, that I should be safe with your father, and never likely to come to want. And then, dear, there was another thing which counted. I knew that I should remain here, near my own family and friends. I don't, reelly and truly, feel that I could wish a son of mine, if I had one, to try to be bigger or better than your dear father. For why? He might fail, mightn't he? Pride goes before a fall. Humpty-Dumpty, you know."

"Enoch is clever."

"That's as may be, child. He has a position here, the respect of everybody in the Close, but——"

Mrs. Vye paused. It occurred to her that the friendship between Enoch and her daughter might, one day, warm into something else. Hitherto there had been no silliness, not even the mildest flirtation. Among the gossips of the Walk, young Saint was regarded as different from other boys, immune from the temptations of youth.

"What were you going to say, Mum?"

"Only this. Enoch has played elder brother to you, and I dessay you think him cleverer than he is. If you were silly enough to try to egg him on to play Dick Whittington, he might end up not Lord Mayor of London, but sweeping a crossing."

"Mum——!"

"He doesn't look a winner, dear. That old pincher, his father, did ought to give the poor lad a better suit of clothes."

Felicity winced, almost betraying herself. At her High School, it was generally agreed that a self-respecting girl couldn't be seen in the company of a shabbily dressed youth. Alf Kerridge, for example, could pick and choose among the beauties because

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he was so smart, so spick and span. He refused to patronise the local tailors and bought his natty suits (and all the adjuncts) in Bath. It was known that Alf, for his part, disdained ill-dressed young women. Felicity decided, there and then, that she must coax Enoch to buy a blue-serge suit and a trilby hat. To throw a little harmless dust into her mother's eyes, she observed prettily :

"Perhaps Enoch aggravated me. He is so set in his ways. Perhaps I did want to stir him up a bit. He's a regular bookworm, but rather a dear, quite the gentleman, and if we both went to work on him, Mum, we might persuade him to dress more like one."

"We must set about getting tea first," said Mrs. Vye.

3

Mealtime, amongst those who toil for their daily bread, is regulated by work-time. At six punctually Mr. Vye expected a substantial nourishing tea. Abel Saint dined at one. Joseph Vye dined at a quarter to two. He was a small man of immense dignity, but intellectually incapable of soaring beyond the ordinary patter of his office, whereas Abel Saint could speak of the cathedral using language which would have been reckoned creditable from a Minor Canon. For this reason Mr. Vye was jealous of his chief's vocabulary. Mr. Vye, moreover, had no patience with cheeseparing and petty economies in the home. He loved his comfort. Felicity, after laying the table for tea, placed a pair of carpet slippers in front of her father's arm chair. He suffered from sore feet. He was an agreeable little man, provided he had his own way, and a not unindulgent father and husband, carrying himself as a Levite should. The butchers,

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bakers and candle-stick makers, were mildly amused, exchanging sly winks, when the name Levite cropped up. So long as the Great White Queen sat upon her throne, the townspeople of Fountains paid willing enough homage to the Close, and accepted their bishop as a feudal lord. After the coronation of King Edward, the pendulum began to swing away from the Levites, who—with the one exception of the Dean—were unaware of this.

Mr. Vye came in, sat down in silence, and began to remove his boots. He looked tired and cross. This called for fussing.

"Now, Fee, help your father. I shall give him his tonic; I'm sure he needs it."

The tonic was an euphemism for a mild toddy.

Mr. Vye sipped his toddy with relish, smacking his lips. In his less robust moments he made inarticulate noises, which Enoch could imitate, queer cluckings and chirpings. His head was too big for his body, and wobbled when he was deeply moved. Vulgar urchins spoke of him as "Moonface." A round pink jowl was framed in what used to be called a Newgate Fringe; a long upper lip beneath a short snubby nose might have belonged to a Dublin jarvey. Nevertheless, Mr. Vye was not unprepossessing; he suggested an elderly, bald-headed cherub; and he looked at all times scrupulously clean. He had, no inconsiderable asset, a confidential way with him. With ladies he could be arch; with his fellow-townsmen he stood too much on his dignity, as if dreading anything approximating to ridicule. However, his wife and daughters knew him to be a very human person, easily managed, if you rubbed the Newgate Fringe the right way. Then he positively purred with satisfaction.

He made an excellent tea, lighted his pipe, and lay back in his chair.

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"Anything to tell us, Father?" asked Mrs. Vye.

"Yes, Mother, yes. I was gureatly honoured this afternoon, gureatly so. I showed the Chapter House to General Sir Alastair Ogilvie-Black, K.C.B., et cetera, who has the Southern Command, a very distinguished soldier, who chatted with ME—as Man to Man. After our chat he presented me with a fine cigar, which I shall smoke after supper."

"Well, I never," ejaculated Mrs. Vye. "Appearances are deceptive. When you come in, Father, I says to myself: 'Pore dear man, he's had a norrid day.'"

"And you were puffectly correct, puffectly. Sir Alastair made it so. He didn't mean to—to frighten me——"

"He couldn't——"

"He did."

"Heaven preserve us!"

"Amen to that. I believe that Heaven will preserve US, come what may."

"Father," said Felicity nervously. "What is coming?"

"Ah-h-h! Battle, murder, an' sudden death. We three settin' here may live to see Fountains destroyed, wiped out! Sir Alastair says, and he knows, that inside six months o' less, we shall be at War with Germany. We may be invaded by Germans. I, for one, took no stock in such wild talk till this afternoon."

"They wouldn't never be wicked enough to destroy our cathedral, Joe," gasped Mrs. Vye.

"War is war, Mother. Me and the General are agreed about that. I did take it upon meself to remind Sir Alastair that Kayser William is cousin German to King George, but the General says that won't make a speck o' difference. Then I asked him whæt we—meanin' the Nation—were going to do

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about it? He may not wish what he said to be repeated——”

“We’re not sieves,” affirmed Mrs. Vye, reproachfully, who at that instant was thinking that she would step in to Mrs. Saint’s before she washed up the tea-things. “Nothing you tell Fee and me ever goes out of this room, does it, Fee?”

“Never, Mum. Please go on, Father.”

Mr. Vye sucked a hollow tooth with violence. Then he continued portentously:

“A man of my experience of the world, a man who has chatted with the Lord Lieutenant o’ this county, not to menshing other generals and admirals, salts, if you know what I mean, everythink he hears. Sir Alastair, till this afternoon, was not pussonally known to me. So I salted what *he* said——”

“Mercy me! Whatever did the man say?”

With three preliminary clicks of his tongue against the palate of his mouth, suggesting a quick-firing gun, and waving a forefinger within a foot of Felicity’s nose, Mr. Vye went on:

“The General says that England, our England, within a year, will be turned into a roarin’, tearin’, do-what-you’re-told and ask-no-questchings, military camp—soldiers everywhere, tents in our Close, and drums an’ fifes disturbin’ the peace o’ Vicars’ Walk.”

“Joe, dear, this general may have had, you know, just an extry glass of sherry wine at lunch——”

More battle-suggesting noises from Mr. Vye, intended to convey reproof. Mrs. Vye apologised, pleading in excuse that her imaginative powers had failed. Certain dreadful things could not be, not if it were never so.

“Mother, you forget——”

“What?”

“You well know, having heard me tell the tale, that war horses have been stabled in the nave of our

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cathedral. What has been may be again. Now, my dear souls, I've worse to tell—"

He paused with dramatic effect not wasted upon Mrs. Vye. But Felicity, who from inexperience was incapable of fear, had begun to realise that the author of her being was enjoying himself——! Did he like frightening a brace of women, or—a much more startling thought—was he pleasurably excited at the possibility of Fountains turned upside down? Had he rebelled in secret against the enforced dullness of his daily duties. Having so little imagination, the prediction that Fountains might be miraculously changed into a miniature Aldershot failed to evoke another picture of, let us say, Enoch Saint desperately wounded or dead upon the field of battle. Her wits, sharp enough up to a point, lingered upon tents in the Close, Tommies (whom she held in no high esteem) swaggering about the town, officers—she admired officers—exchanging smiles with the pretty girls, thousands of strangers coming and going, brisk trade in the shops, mad excitement dominating everything and everybody——!

"Worse?" repeated Mrs. Vye, in quavering tones.

"I read the papers," said Mr. Vye majestically. "That is a duty and a pleasure. Often, as to-day, taking distinguished visitors to the Chapter House, the talk takes a chatty turn. I permit nothink of that sort in the cathedral. And I'm not too free with my tongue in our Cloisters which is holy ground to me——"

"Father," urged Mrs. Vye, "do please tell us what could be worse than what you've said already."

"Now, Mother, understand that I'm preparing you like for a shock. Let me tell this my own way. I repeat I read the noos o' the day, and I keep my finger on the pulse o' the people. Have you heard, ma, I ask, of the blue-water school?"

Miss, Mrs. and Mr. Vye

Mrs. Vye shook her head. She had heard of the blue-coat school.

"Till this afternoon, Mother, I belonged to the blue-water school. I believed, rightly or wrongly, that the British Fleet could protect Old England——"

"And so it can," said Mrs. Vye, almost viciously.

"Field Marshal Earl Roberts, K.G., is not so cocksure as you are about that. I say again I read the papers. Well—what about it? *This*. . . . Because we don't hold with war, because we hate conscription and all that, we refuse, most of us, to believe in war. Another thing—we get cross when this talk of war is rammed down our throats——"

"I do," admitted Mrs. Vye. "I says, and I hope Miss Fee here is listening, that our enemies are these shameless suffragists and suffragettes——"

"Tch, tch, tch!" Mr. Vye imposed silence. "It comes to this. I, and all quiet peaceable men like me, have thought, and hoped, I dessay, that war talk must be taken for what it was worth coming from soldiers. Never, never, till this afternoon, did it enter my head that a great gentleman who was not a soldier could look me in the eye and tell me he believed that war with Germany must come and soon—very soon."

"What great gentleman says that, Joe?"

"Dean Dyson."

Mrs. Vye capitulated unconditionally.

"If Mr. Dean said that, I know what I'm a-going to do?"

"Yes, dear——?"

"I shall see to it that Felicity joins up with the Red Cross before the week's out. What do you say, child?"

"Oh, I'm always ready for a bit of fun," replied Felicity.

Mr. Vye rebuked her with a deep growl and a

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minatory gesture. Then, even more portentously than before, he repeated what the Dean had said. War was inevitable; and it must be, when it came, an Armageddon into which all the great nations would be drawn. But the Dean had gone further than this talking confidentially with an old servant and friend; he predicted a change in national life and manners, quite immeasurable at the moment; and he went on to foresee the dislocation of social conditions, the impoverishment of the landed gentry and much else that had to be included in the colossal costs of a world-wide war. Mr. Vye had happened to meet the Dean within a few minutes of his talk with Sir Alastair. Incredulously, he had repeated what Sir Alastair had said, expecting rebuttal and words of comfort. Instead he had been, temporarily, stricken to the dust. A great soldier and a great civilian thought alike.

4

Felicity saw Enoch for a few minutes after supper. Already, she had been vouchsafed a glimpse of him as a soldier; but surely he would be among the last to go. At any rate she was not prepared to discuss with him horrors. It would quite spoil a really exciting day if she did. The fervour of his kisses, with no garish light to reveal her blushes, seemed to bestow sovereignty on her. Obviously, he loved her so dearly that he would do anything to please her. He did comply delightfully with the first shy request, the more eagerly, perhaps, because he had determined that he couldn't leave Fountains. He meant to tell her so at the first opportunity.

"Will you do something to please me, Enie?"

"I should think I would, you sweet thing. What is it?"

Miss, Mrs. and Mr. Uye

"I want you to buy yourself a nice smart new suit of clothes. I* rather fancied blue serge with a grey trilby hat; but I changed my mind when I was half way through my cup of cocoa at supper. I'm simply dying to see you in a grey suit, light grey flannel coat and trousers, with a buttonhole, and a straw 'boater', with a riband round it matching your tie."

"Bless you! You shall. I'll have a fit—and so will Dad, although I shan't ask him to pay for mine."

"Oh, I do love you, Enie, more and more and more."

5

Now young Saint, being his father's son, being the Dean's pupil and friend, was a youth methodical in his habits. After parting from Felicity in the friendly dark of the back-garden he hastened to his bedroom, where he set down in scholarly handwriting the items of his new Spring plumage. Suddenly, pencil in hand, he paused. Within the week he had seen a young man wearing a jaunty grey flannel suit, a straw "boater" embellished by a gay riband, and, yes, sporting in the lapel of his coat some bright blossom. As he walked, he flourished a cane——!

Felicity must have seen and admired this youth. Who was he? Not the Dean's nephew? No. One of the bishop's grandsons? No. A good-looking chap, with a roguish, roving eye.

Young Alf Kerridge.

CHAPTER THREE

In The Brenda Gorge

I

FELICITY did not join the Red Cross. Within twenty-four hours the Walk was repeating what Mr. Vye had said was not to be repeated. The Walk refused to be intimidated. Indeed, all over the kingdom, there was a soporific lull before the storm broke with such incredible fury. The Close, with the salient exception of the wisest man in it, refused to believe that war could be. The more enlightened of the younger clergy, with regrettable (according to the Bishop) Radical tendencies, quoted Mr. Norman Angell and pinned their faith to the *Daily News* and that sea-green incorruptible the *Westminster Gazette*.

Abel Saint, although the gossips had it that he understudied the Dean, sided with the majority. When his son cited Mr. Vye as an echo, the senior verger, looking very thin, very cross, and very yellow, snapped out viciously: "I don't take step from any man. And if war comes, it can't last. It will be too costly a business."

Meanwhile Enoch was happy in a fool's paradise taking for granted that Felicity loved him even as he loved her. Impossible, and foolish, to blame either man or maid. Felicity was little more than a child, not quite so innocent as she looked, inoffensively well pleased with herself, self-assured that she was prettier and better educated than her sisters, anxious to please, radiating joy in the passing moment, and a very good little girl, albeit incapable of measuring accurately

In The Brenda Gorge

either Enoch's feelings or her own. She was clever enough to know that her lover took himself seriously ; and instinctively she reckoned this to be a disability. She hoped that she might be able to chaff him out of his brooding introspective moods, so alien to her, out of a self-depreciation that diminished his market value. Mrs. Vye, who had occasional flashes of true insight, had said disconcertingly :

" Enoch is an old man's son I mind me when us girls all said that Abel Saint would never marry. He must have been forty-four when he began to pay attention to Lily Bissell. My ! How we laughed over that ! She taught in the Infant School. Prim—— ! The primmest of the prim. A thin, pale, lackadaisical spinster, very pernickety in her ways. But the wedding was quite classy. Oh, yes, a reel swell affair. But not one of us girls ever thought we'd live to see old Abel pushing a pram along the Green. We did—with Judy in it, a lovely baby, but Lily had to pay for Judy. When Enoch came along five years afterwards, we all thought that Abel would be left alone with Judy. I don't believe that Lily has had one day's good health since ; and the baby looked exactly like a little old marmoset. Well, Fee, they say, and may be it's gospel truth, that an old man's child is born old. Abel was past fifty when Enoch was christened."

Felicity recalled this talk which had taken place before Enoch kissed her. She couldn't escape the conviction that Enoch had little or none of the resiliency of youth. The Dean might have told her that the main difference between her lover and herself was one of " values". She thought too much of appearances ; he thought too little. She underestimated tradition and convention ; he was something of a bond-slave to both. True love, however, laughs at such differences.

Vicars' Walk

During the merrie month of May they were very happy. It was so easy to meet, but not too easy. Enoch, being a Romantic, invented a cypher; they corresponded, hiding their letters behind a row of *quartos* in the Gate House Library. To the girl this was tremendous fun, a daily excitement. The boy suffered now and again from the prickings of conscience. He disliked any form of dissimulation; he wanted his people and all Fountains to know that Felicity was *his* girl. But she refuted, prettily and obstinately, his arguments in favour of laying their cards face up on the table.

Because Enoch was happy, he became more healthy. His eyes grew clearer and more glowing; into his pale cheeks flowed a delicate colour; he carried himself less humbly. Wearing his new grey flannel suit, he had an odd, heartening adventure. He saw the bishop approaching, carrying a heavy book. My lord of Fountains was greatly beloved, the more so, perhaps, because he was gentle and kind, rather than clever. Cynics said that he had been elevated to the Upper House because his grandfather had been a duke. He was very shortsighted. When Enoch raised his hat—the straw “boater”, the bishop smiled, as if inviting the young man to speak to him. At once Enoch approached and asked if he might carry the book. The Bishop not only gave him the book, but slipped a hand through Enoch’s arm. When they reached the Gateway of the Palace, my lord said in his slightly quavering old man’s voice: “You must forgive a failing memory. Your face is so familiar to me. Are you staying with the Dean? Perhaps you would like to come in and have a cup of tea with me.” Enoch explained who he was. The Bishop laughed. “My dear boy, I mistook you for a sprig of quality—and so you are. I repeat my invitation: drink a cup of tea with me.” All Fountains heard of this.

In The Brenda Gorge

2

At the beginning of that flaming June, preceding a wet August, during which the very heavens seemed to be weeping everlastingly because a world war had begun, Alf Kerridge, the son of the publican, organised a party of young people to visit the Brenda Gorge and Caves. Really this was an experiment. Only quite recently had such expeditions been possible. The Walk did not "hold" with unrestrained liberty accorded to youthful pairs. It was admitted that the motor-cycle and the motor 'bus had come to stay, but Mrs Vye and other ladies eyed both with profound distrust. Alf Kerridge was the first to own a motor-cycle. On this, with a pillion girl, he scoured the countryside. Both Mrs. Vye and Mrs. Saint made scathing comments about such junketings. No young maid, according to them, could hope to return from a ride with Alf with unblemished reputation. The "Frenchy" in Alf forbade such optimism. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, Alf remained on easy pleasant terms with both ladies. He had such a way with him. Mrs. Vye deplored his harum-scarum naughtiness, laughing herself silly over his jokes. Abel Saint said that Alf was a moral idiot.

When Felicity heard of the proposed expedition, she made up her mind that Enoch and she must take part in it. Alf had said to Enoch: "You come along. Dig up a girl. Your new suit is the talk o' the town. You are now a nut, a filbert. If you haven't a girl, I'll provide one—a peach."

When Enoch repeated this conversation to Felicity, she said quickly:

"We'll go, Enie. I'll manage it."

"No such luck. Can't be managed."

"I want to have a heavenly day with you. I shall love and adore every minute of it. You drop in ~~in~~

Vicars' Walk

evening and watch on. I've a plan. Sit still, and when Mum appeals to you, as she will, you agree with her. See ? ”

“ Not too plainly.”

“ You start a scowl when I mention Willie Hiles.”

“ Willie Hiles ? ”

Willie Hiles was cut to much the same pattern as Alf Kerridge, a roysterer, a swaggerer, a sly and, in Enoch's opinion, a dirty dog. Felicity, dimpling with mischief, refused to discuss her plans, but was certain that she would triumph gloriously——

And she did.

3

Enoch dropped in after supper. Mr. Vye, with two cold pork chops under his belt, welcomed him pleasantly enough. Enoch took his seat in the inglenook, cool in summer, warm in winter. The Saints and the Vyes used their parlours whether there was company or not. Perhaps the most delightful and surprising fact about the Walk was that no two of the houses had been built alike ; and yet all were homogeneous. Nobody had heard of the name of the architect, probably a master-builder who builded better than he knew.

Felicity wasted no time. It had been agreed between the pair that in the presence of parents it would be expedient to *camouflage* (an unknown word then) their love affair with light bickerings.

“ Hullo, old stick-in-the-mud, ever so glad you came in this evening,” said Felicity brightly. “ You can stand up for little me against Mum. I want to ask a favour of her. But she's such an old-fashioned dear that she may get cross. Did you know, Enie, that Mum thinks the world of you ? Mum told me that ~~she~~ wished you were her son.”

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Mrs. Vye nodded, beaming at Enoch, and ready to burst into speech. Felicity went rattling on :

" Alf Kerridge is taking a party to Brenda. And I want to go. No parents, just boys and girls. We shall picnic in the Gorge."

Mrs. Vye sucked down the fly.

" We—! You won't go anywheres, my girl, with Alf Kerridge "

" I knew you'd say that Alf wouldn't ask me. But there's Willie Hiles. May I go with him? "

" You may not. About the only good thing I know about Willie is that he was born and lives in our Walk, but he don't walk in our ways. Have you ever, unbeknownst to me, traipsed off with Willie? "

" Never."

" Well, you never will—and that's that."

To Enoch's bewilderment Felicity looked as if she were about to burst into tears. Her mouth puckered; her eyelashes flickered; she flung a hunted glance at her mother and began to whimper. Mr. Vye removed his long pipe from his mouth.

" Now, Fee, now don't take on. Mother can't abide Willie Hiles—and nor can I. It fair beats me that such a young scallywag had the impudence to ask you to go with him."

" He didn't," wailed Felicity. " I meant to ask him to take me. I've never seen the Caves; I've never seen anything. I've known Willie all my life. It's a poor compliment to your own daughter that you can't trust her out of your sight." She turned upon Enoch, who could hardly believe that his little sweetheart was such an accomplished actress. " Why don't you speak up for me, Enie? Nice friend you are. Now you tell Mum, who thinks you such a clever man, that she's all wrong about this."

" She isn't," said Enoch emphatically. " If I had a young sister I wouldn't let her be seen with Willie

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Hiles. He has the brains of a rabbit and the manners of a monkey."

Mrs. Vye applauded; Mr. Vye made cluckings, but obviously they were sorry for Felicity. Then Mr. Vye said heavily:

"Are you going to Brenda, me lad?"

"Not much in my line," replied Enoch, evasively.

"Old stay-at-home," snapped Felicity.

"Tch, tch, tch! If you *was* going, Enoch, I'd let Fee go along with you. What do you say, Mother?"

"What you say, Joe."

"Never occurred to you, I dessay, to ask Enoch, eh, Missie?" went on Mr. Vye, smiling benevolently.

"If I did ask him, he'd say 'no.' Ask *him*? Not me."

"Well, I'll ask him," said Mrs. Vye. "Now, Enie boy, to oblige Mr. Vye an' me, will you take Fee to Brenda?"

"Of course I will," replied Enoch heartily.

"Then you can both pop into the garden and talk the trip over. I dessay I shall see my way to getting the child a summer frock, one of these tasty shiffons."

"Oh, Mum, how sweet you are!"

4

The great day dawned. Mrs. Vye was almost as excited as her daughter. Other mothers had been wheedled into according a reluctant assent to what was generally considered a "cutting loose" from Persian and Medean laws. Anxious matrons repeated the solacing *cliché*—safety in numbers. Two ancient brakes, belonging to Mr. Alfred Kerridge, senior, were in commission. Somehow it leaked out—probably

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from young Alf—that Mr. Kerridge had imposed upon his son (and heir) very definite instructions. The landlord of The Open Arms put business before pleasure. He was well aware that if—if the young people behaved themselves, such excursions would soon be “all the go.” Young Alf told everybody that Dad was providing a scrumptious lunch at half-a-crown a head, including salmon, chicken, strawberries and cream, cider, ginger-beer, and lemonade. It was reported that Mr. Kerridge would lose money over the lunch. Teas would be supplied locally.

Enoch blinked when he beheld Felicity in her new frock, a surprise for him and others. Mrs. Vye made the pair stand together, arm in arm, whilst she took their photograph. Unhappily she forgot to do something or other. Ultimately there was no photograph. Felicity assumed the right pose, smiled (displaying her dimple) and looked prettier than ever. Enoch, wondering whether Mrs. Vye could hear his heart thumping against his ribs, was scowling fiercely. It seemed to him incredible that this enchantress belonged to him. Putting on a new frock (and a picture hat) she had bloomed into a woman. He felt dazed, so bewildered that his scowl deepened. Mrs. Vye addressed him :

“Mercy me, Enoch Saint, you ain’t taking Fee to a funeral. Do you hate this little jaunt?”

“I’m going to love it,” replied Enoch, crimson in the face.

Perhaps—who can tell?—Mrs. Vye guessed how it was with the poor boy. She said hastily :

“I was only joking, Enie. Now, dear, you’ll look after Fee, won’t you?”

“I’ll look after him, Mum. We ought to be off. We start at ten sharp, no waiting for anybody.”

She was dancing with excitement and glee.

Mrs. Vye accompanied them. The Open Arms, an

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ancient Tudor house, once a manor house, then a farm house, finally a tavern, was built of stone with heavily timbered gables. In front of it, on a small common, donkeys and geese grazed. The two brakes, drawn by two horses apiece, were on the common, out of the way of road traffic. The inn stood just outside Fountains.

The young people, more Jacks than Jills, so Mrs. Vye remarked, assembled decorously, sensible that age had a rheumy eye on youth. At a signal from young Alf they would take their places in the brakes. At the horses' heads two boys were sheepishly grinning. Each, after the start, would stand on the step. Young Alf strutted about, carrying a beribboned whip, a large rosette in his buttonhole. Old Alf, weighing about eighteen stone, surveyed the company beamingly. He could carry more ale without showing it than any man in Fountains, but Mrs. Vye knew that his days were numbered. At any moment young Alf might be called upon to reign in his stead. Old Alf had built up a fine business. What would young Alf do with it? It is likely that young Alf, had his father been a well man, would have found less favour in the eyes of the mothers. Those with marriageable daughters made allowance for the rascal, because his mother—"that Frenchwoman"—had died five years previously when she might have exercised a restraining influence over a saucy lad. It was what you might expect from a Frenchwoman to have only one child. Really, if you looked at it from a Christian point of view, a tempting of Providence.

At a minute before ten the young men and maidens clambered into the brakes. Then it was discovered that Willie Hiles was missing, shamelessly and inexcusably late. A babble of voices arose. Was Willie bringing a girl? Young Alf, after glancing at a list of his passengers, announced that Willie was

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bringing Miss Bessie Custard. Half a dozen young ladies began to giggle. Mrs. Vye frowned. Miss Custard was a pillion-rider, and catholic in her tastes, eager and willing to take the air with any young man who carried a light heart and cash in his pocket. Both Willie and Bessie were, so to speak, smudges upon the shield *argent* of Vicars' Walk.

Suddenly Homeric laughter arose, as Willie appeared, dressed as a Pierrot and carrying a banjo. Beside him, hanging on his arm, walked Miss Custard. The young people, abandoning restraint, laughed and cheered. Old Alf grunted, with an eye cocked at public opinion. Willie twanged his banjo. Enoch whispered to Felicity :

*"By the wisdom of the centuries I speak—
To the tune of yestermorn I set the truth—
I, the joy of life unquestioned—I, the Greek—
I, the everlasting Wonder Song of Youth!"*

Felicity clutched his arm, and whispered back :
"Enie, have you gone potty? What are you saying?"

Enoch explained that he was quoting from Kipling's *Song of the Banjo*. He was aware that he had quoted aptly and at the same time conscious that Felicity was not impressed. Her attention, indeed, was focussed upon Bessie Custard, likely to be acclaimed as the belle of the party. Bessie, judging by the expression upon her provocative little face, shared this conviction. Her eyes sparkled with fun and mischief, as she exclaimed gaily :

"Sorry we're late, but ain't we worth waiting for?"
Thus speaking, the brazen hussy, for so Mrs. Vye regarded her, blew a kiss to Alf, who, as brazenly, returned it.

Felicity perceived that her mother was not amused.

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5

The first brake, driven by Alf, held the *élite* of the party. Alf and Lucy Panter sat on the box seat. Willie Hiles, by the luck of things, was next to Felicity, whom he pretended not to recognise, saying to Enoch in a loud voice: "I should be pleased, Mr. Saint, if you would introduce me to your lady friend. From London, I presoom." To Enoch's indignation, this amused Felicity, who, out of sight of a censorious mother, laughed too loudly, provoking Willie to take liberties. He began to tickle her, thereby imperilling the freshness of the flowered chiffon frock. Enoch would have liked to have pitched Willie out of the brake, but, unhappily, of the two Willie was incontestably the stronger, and a noted "tackler" in the football field. When Enoch essayed a sharp word of protest, Willie retorted: "You silly chump, Fee doesn't mind. You can tickle Bessie and call it quits. We ain't in your bloomin' old cathedral."

However, Fee, thinking of her frock, did mind; and soon comparative order was re-established. As they bowled along through the most pastoral and unspoiled portion of Wessex, conversation languished. Lucy Panter's brother entertained the company with a concertina; Willie was ever ready to oblige with the banjo; so time passed swiftly and joyously. Mrs. Vye would have admitted that the young people behaved themselves. It would be terrible to be mistaken for a bunch of Bristol trippers of the baser sort. But Mrs. Vye, with her alertness of observation, might have noticed that Bessie Custard, who was sitting not next to Willie but opposite Enoch, seemed to be visibly impressed by Enoch's gentlemanly appearance; and, presuming that Willie was sensible of this, he, for his part sidled up to Felicity. When Felicity edged away, he suggested that she might, if

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she wanted more room, seat herself on his knee. Poor Enoch was unable to cope with Willie, a past master of playful badinage ; but he could have suffered such a damned fool gladly, had Felicity exhibited annoyance. Obviously, Willie was fish to her net. She laughed encouragingly at his quips, although she was careful, the artful little dear, to nestle closer to her own lover, as if to say : " I'm yours, but he is such a funny boy, isn't he ? "

On arrival at Brenda, which they entered from the lower end of the Gorge, Alf took command of his party. He and the driver of the second brake had to find a suitable picnicking ground, and unship the provisions. Then they would return to the village, stable the horses, and be ready to join the others and visit the caves.

Alf drove off, up the Gorge, accompanied by his acolyte on the step. Immediately the girls of the party linked up, arm in arm, leaving the boys to do the same. The girls strolled away, chattering like jays ; the boys stood still. One veteran of twenty summers said : " This is the time, me lads, for a quiet smoke," and began to fill his pipe. To Enoch's amusement, another youth, barely sixteen, flourished a large cigar. Willie protested : " Look here, baby-boy, you keep that till you've cut your wisdom teeth." The baby-boy, much affronted, retorted with heat : " I ain't got no girl, Willie. This cigar is all I 'ave got. I stole it from Dad, and I'm a-going to enjoy meself."

Enoch wandered off to stare at the enchanting white and grey cottages, mirrored in the mere. This was his second visit to Brenda, and he could now bring a more intelligent mind to bear on it. He knew it to be a beauty spot and a wonderland hardly known as yet outside the county. It annoyed him that such a delicious little village was becoming vulgarised.

Vicars' Walk

Surely it was unique, something to be preserved, like the cathedral of Fountains, from the contaminating touch of the vandal. He wondered if there was another young man in the party who felt as he did ; he wondered too, if Felicity, when he got her alone, would listen with unfeigned interest to what he could tell her. On the previous afternoon he had read eagerly all that he could find about the Caves and Gorge in the Gate House Library. He wanted this to be a Red Letter Day, something to remember. But, alas, already he was sensible that he was in and of the wrong crowd. If he could have brought his little maid here alone—! But would she have enjoyed that as much ? And after all, this was her day out, not his. For her sake, he must play the game as the others played it. More, he must be careful not to betray any jealousy of misbegotten fools like Willie Hiles. Nobody must suspect that Felicity Vye was “ his ” girl.

Presently he heard a shout.

Five minutes later, he was entering the biggest cave.

6

Before entering, he enjoyed a tiny and reassuring triumph. The guide was a quiet man with a pair of dark eyes and thin slender hands. His voice was engagingly clear and low. The son of the senior verger divined that this guide was glancing at the young persons about him, picking and choosing one, if he could find one, who would listen to him intelligently and with sympathy. Rarely, indeed, did old Abel Saint select the wrong man or woman or even child. Without hesitation the guide said to Enoch politely : “ This way, sir.” Enoch was standing back at the

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moment, but he felt Felicity's hand upon his arm. She pushed him forward. Simultaneously Bessie Custard advanced on Enoch's other side; and these three were the first to follow the guide into the cave. Throughout the brief tour the guide addressed Enoch.

Evidently the man knew his job, and wished to impress Enoch with that fact. He began at once:

"I want to call your attention to the stalactites and stalagmites, which are made of carbonate of lime. The stalactite hangs down, as you see, and the stalagmite slowly raises itself up to meet it. When they meet, a pillar is formed, and slowly that pillar increases in size so long as water flows over it, leaving its deposit of lime. All these wonderful forms which you will see have been thus made. A stalactite in these caves, so it has been estimated, grows about one inch in a thousand years——"

"Oo-o-o!" said Felicity.

The guide indicated a stalactite and stalagmite separated one from the other by a gap of some five inches. Willie's voice was heard:

"You say those two will join up, some day, get married?"

"Yes."

"Drop me a post card when they do. I live in Vicars' Walk, Fountains."

This provoked a titter from most of the girls, but the guide had the last and loudest laugh.

"I know Vicars' Walk," he said gravely. "I'm surprised to hear that popinjays nest there."

The tour ended too soon for Enoch, but he could see that Felicity was not listening very attentively, hoping, possibly, that Mr. Hiles would make another enlivening remark. Enoch perceived that these youngsters had no imagination. The caves, to them, were caves—not much more. Their superlative beauty,

Vicars' Walk

on a miniature scale, the pillars, pinnacles and pilasters, some white, some pink, some deep red—all exquisitely reflected in tiny pools of crystalline water—evoked grunts from the boys and gasps from the girls. But Enoch could magnify what he beheld; he could see vast halls, cathedrals, palaces. He knew that what he saw was the work of a million years; he knew that prehistoric men, prehistoric beasts, had lived in these caves.

To his surprise Bessie Custard displayed intelligence. He had to amend previous judgments of her, but he remembered that she had been a bright girl at school. He remembered also that she had mocked him when he was an awkward, bashful lout, wearing—thanks to a father's parsimony—coats and trousers out of which thin wrists and ankles protruded. To-day, Bessie was almost deferential in her manner.

They came out into the sunshine. Immediately the boys began to buy souvenirs for the girls, as the guide explained that bits of bone offered for sale belonged to mammoths and cave bears. Again Felicity exclaimed "Oo-o-o!" The girls were now together again, giggling and whispering. Bessie remained by Enoch.

"What did you think of that cave?" he asked.

"I thought it fairyland. I—I could give lunch a miss and go back there. I would if you went with me."

Enoch blushed.

"I believe," Bessie went on, cooingly, "that you are the only boy here with brains. The guide dropped on to that. Between us two I'll bet that Alf's nose is paining him. And Willie Hiles got what he deserved."

Enoch nodded. Bessie glanced at him roguishly, gave an enticing little laugh, and joined the other girls.

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7

The cold collation so generously provided by Mr. Kerridge, senior, was indeed a banquet worthy of such an occasion. The baby-boy had smoked his huge cigar, and—none the worse—proceeded to gorge himself with cold salmon—! Young Alf advised everybody to drink the cider cup, which he had made himself. It was harmless enough ; but Alf had added a pint of sherry. Felicity refused the cup and asked for ginger beer. During luncheon Alf paid her marked attention. Whereupon Lucy Panter who knew her Alf, paid even more attention to Willie Hiles. Bessie Custard made unblushing advances to Enoch, finally placing a strawberry between her lips and inviting him to share it. He felt and looked rather a fool because he declined this sporting offer.

As soon as luncheon was over—they spent an hour over it—the boys smoked, whilst the girls wandered off again, seeking spots whence proper views of the Castle and Lion's Rock could be had. Meanwhile, Enoch wondered if he should ever be alone with Fee. Quite impossible, unless the rest of the party paired. Young Alf said presently : " The girls will want to pick flowers. After tea, boys, comes kissing time." To this Willie Hiles replied flippantly : " And have you made up your mind, my lord, who is to have the honour of being kissed by you ? " Alf said grinningly : " No complaints, if you take a ramble with Lucy." Then still grinning, he looked at Enoch. " If you aren't careful, Enie, Bessie will be hugging you." This provoked loud laughter from the other boys. Enoch was furious, but he had to dissemble his fury. It says much for his power of self-control that he could do this. Temptation seized him to confront these grinning youths with the truth. Then, according to the unwritten law, both he and Felicity would be

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left alone. But he knew that Felicity would be terribly upset. As lightly as he could, and twisting his mouth into rather a silly smile, he said: "Damn Bessie, and you too!"

Presently the girls wandered back, sitting down demurely enough as if they had agreed among themselves to postpone pairing. Bessie called upon Enoch to tell them more about the gorge. Thus challenged, and much heartened, because Alf had slipped away to attend to his horses, Enoch held forth. He knew his subject, but his delivery was halting. Alone with Felicity he would have been eloquent, and without doubt she would have listened delightfully with her tender eyes looking up into his. Instead she sat beside another girl, leaning against her. The other girl was a good, plump, rosy-cheeked creature, with maternal instincts. She held Felicity's hand, and stroked it gently.

Felicity fell asleep.

8

The boys paid for the girls' tea. At six-thirty, so Alf announced, the brakes would come round. If, he hinted roguishly, couples wandered too far afield, they would have to return to Fountains as best they might. Throughout the day Alf had assumed a certain authority. He looked to be what he was, a fully grown man, and a fine figure of a man, able to hold his own with other men, able to hold more than his own with women. Impossible to blame little Felicity for being pleased and flattered by his attentions. The wild flowers had been gathered; the sights had been seen; the souvenirs had been bought. One hour remained. The boys, having talked themselves out, ogled the girls; the girls tittered and blushed. Enoch

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knew that the dangerous moment had come. With a boldness that surprised himself, he marched up to Felicity, and said pleasantly :

"Fee, will you take a brisk little walk with me? We haven't seen the top of the Gorge yet."

Felicity laughed.

"Yes, I will, Enie. It's a duty, isn't it? My! I've eaten so much that I feel like going to sleep for ever and ever."

"Come on," said Enoch.

Heedless of what the others might do, Enoch, with Felicity trotting at his side, strode off. Bessie bit her lip; Lucy Panter smiled; all the boys glanced at Alf, who—thanks to the Gallic tincture—threw back his handsome head and laughed.

"Enoch Saint," he said, "may live to pick a winner."

9

"Don't walk so fast, Enie," pleaded Felicity.

"Sorry! I wanted to get away from them."

"Why? How odd you look. What's wrong?"

"Everything."

"Let's sit down. I'm so hot already, and so are you."

Without replying, Enoch left the road, and began to ascend a steep slope. Here were enormous boulders, huge enough to screen from observation a brakeful of trippers. Enoch flung himself down behind one. Felicity, panting and bewildered, wondered why he didn't kiss her.

"You look so cross. Why?"

He answered the question torrentially, as all that he had suppressed burst out of him. The day had been spoiled from the very minute when that silly ass had tried to tickle her. She might thank her

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stars that she wasn't alone with either Willie or Alf. They were no respecters of young women who played with fire. Paying no attention to the indignant glance which this remark provoked, Enoch continued. Mrs. Vye had entrusted her ewe lamb to him. And the lambkin had behaved like a giddy little goat. She had flirted shamelessly with Alf at lunch; and later, when he, Enoch, was talking for HER, and at HER, talking, too, about a wonderland, she had shown her appreciation of all the pains which he had taken entirely and solely on her account, to fall asleep——!

At this point, had he paused, Felicity, sensible that she had disgraced herself by dozing off, might have expressed contrition. Then probably, Enoch would have kissed and forgiven her. Unhappily, excess of intelligence undid this young man. He perceived, only too clearly, what had escaped her. He knew that the day would have been delightful, enchanting, had they gone on the expedition as an engaged couple. She had imposed secrecy; she had wanted it both ways. She wanted his undivided devotion; she wanted, also, to have a good time with other boys. And that was not playing the game.

When he did pause, Felicity set about her defence with a fire and fury which Miss Bessie Custard might have envied—and commended. How dare he accuse her of light behaviour? Oh, the cheek of it, after the way he had carried on with that hateful Bessie. And he, the son of a verger, brought up as he had been, must have a filthy mind. Willie Hiles meant no harm. He tried to tickle every girl he met. Willie, anyway, had done his best to make the party a success. Suppose even that she had gone for a stroll with young Alf Kerridge—couldn't she take care of herself? Well, it was a blessed mercy that he had shown himself

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up in his true colours, as a dog-in-the-manger, a spoil-sport, a wet blanket, a dismal Jimmy. Now he had spoiled the day, wrecked it irretrievably. He had been hateful, and she was perfectly miserable. Would he, please, take her back to Brenda. She proposed to take a last look at the village, because never, never, would she willingly gaze upon the beastly place again. So there!

The critical will observe that Miss Vye evaded the real issue; and Enoch was quick to see this. He was not quick, being so sadly inexperienced in women's ways, to perceive her point of view, essentially girlish, and altogether natural. Mrs. Vye, had she been a witness of what had passed, would have said sensibly: "You have both behaved very well and properly under difficult circumstances. Make it up at once. Forgive and forget." Enoch was mad with longing to take this tempestuous child of Eve into his arms again, but what was logical in his mind rose up to fight and conquer what was illogical in her. However, he tempered his tone:

"Fee—don't be silly. Can't you see that all this has come about because we are secretly engaged?"

"We aren't engaged now——"

"You are talking like a fretful child——"

"Go it! Say all the nasty things you can——"

"Come, come, be reasonable. From the very first I couldn't make out why you persuaded me and coaxed me to do something which I knew, in my bones, was deceitful and wrong. Don't speak! I—I repeat—deceitful and wrong. If we had marched straight to our people there might have been a bit of a rumpus, but in the end we should have won through. Your folks like me; my folks like you. Had we done this, you would be wearing to-day the pretty ring which I'm aching to buy for you. I don't say we shouldn't

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have to wait for the other ring, but we have to do that, anyway."

She jumped up.

"Take me back, please. If you don't, I'll walk back by myself. That's what I want to do, but it would start a lot of talk."

"Fee, darling, give me leave to speak to your mother to-night?"

"No."

"You are breaking our engagement?"

"There never was, and now there never will be, a real engagement. I—I hate to hurt you, Enoch, but you've asked for this. When you kissed me in Gate House, you made too sure of me. I—I wasn't sure of myself. I'd never had an affair. If we'd gone to Mother, she'd have asked me, as soon as we were alone, if you were everything, *everything* in the world to me. I know she would. And I couldn't have lied to her. Now you know the truth. I only wanted to wait, to—to—c-c-carry on till I was perfectly sure that you were everything in the world to me—and you aren't."

Her voice died on a whisper.

Enoch stared at her, paralysed with misery and dismay. He opened his lips and closed them, unable to articulate. Slowly her face hardened, as he remained silent.

"We must pretend," she said coldly. "I shan't give myself away to those grinning boys. Come——"

.

The eternal hills heard and made no sign. So this was the end of what might have been a perfect day! Felicity ran down the steep slope. For an instant Enoch stood still, looking up. The sun was still high in the cloudless azure. Not a sound broke the uncanny silence of the Gorge, down which, eons

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ago, torrents must have roared and thundered. Here was all that "expands the spirit, yet appalls." Enoch put his hand across his eyes, as if to blot out the ruthless beauty and resplendence. Then, with a muttered curse, he hastened after the Felicity, who might spell happiness for another, but not—so every aching tissue in body and brain told him—not for him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nunkle

I

FELICITY cried herself to sleep on the night succeeding the Brenda expedition, but her mother never suspected that there had been a quarrel between the boy shepherd and her ewe lamb. Enoch returned the lamb to the fold, and declined a cordial invitation to stay to supper, saying grimly that he was sure Felicity had seen enough of him; whereupon Mrs. Vye leapt to the conclusion that a long, hot day had been too much for a delicate youth. At supper Felicity laughed and chattered as usual. However, next morning, pleading indisposition, she breakfasted in bed.

She wanted to think things over quietly. As soon as it was light, she had left her bed to inspect herself in a not too flattering mirror. What she expected to see must remain a vague conjecture. Having wept copiously, she had dozed off to wake again and again to full consciousness of what had happened. On each occasion she blamed Enoch for having driven sleep from her pillow. Enoch had dared to accuse her of light behaviour. Her conscience was clear as the pools in the Brenda Caves about that. She made no sustained effort to stand in Enoch's shoes, because she lacked imagination. She had longed to be alone with him; and he, all day, was cherishing hard thoughts of her, deliberately intending to scold her and "pick" at her. Expecting kisses she had received kicks. Once more she evaded the real issue, hating to admit even to herself that she could be wrong, or mistaken. Apologies

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were odious. At school, when called upon by a teacher to express regret, she would close her pretty lips and sit exasperatingly silent, preferring punishment to the easy speaking of one word "sorry."

Careful inspection of a pouting little face was reassuring. Faintly she smiled. She was prettier than Bessie Custard. And both Alf and Willie had made that heartening discovery yesterday. Before the war, those two bedraggled words, sex appeal, may have been used by the very few, never by young girls. Felicity was too innocent (or ignorant) to understand their full significance; but she knew that a subtle change in her outward appearance had taken place. The faint smile brightened into a more studied expression, as her lips parted revealing white small teeth. The dimple in her left cheek shyly showed itself; her eyes began to sparkle.

"Ooo-o-o-o-o——!"

She hopped back into bed and slept soundly till seven.

Mum approved of her staying in bed; Mum fussed over her; but, best of all, Mum was too busy with a.m. domestic activities to sit down and talk. She bustled off, leaving her dear little woman alone with two poached eggs, a rasher of bacon, and a pot of home-made jam.

Her dear little woman. . . .

Felicity attacked the poached eggs with the conviction that she was a woman, and must behave like a woman, not like a flighty school-girl.

Should she make it up with Enie?

If she lacked the imagination to understand a young man not easy to understand, she had wit enough to understand herself. She could set *pros* against *cons* and strike a balance. Doggedly she stuck to her own popguns. If she made it up with Enie, he would insist upon an engagement. Reluctantly, she had to admit

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that the parents would, after mild protest, sanction it. By-byes then to the fun of clandestine meetings, ta-ta to the letters in cypher—! Congratulations, yes, pleasant, patronising words of cheer from the Close, pats of approval from the Walk, kisses—some of them Judas kisses—from her girl friends, and—and—and an interminable wait for a husband. Meanwhile, according to every written and unwritten law in Fountains, she would be Enoch's property, ring-marked as his indisputable possession, accepted as such even by such bold buccaneers as Young Alf and Willie Hiles.

The balance was struck.

She would not make it up.

2

Far otherwise was it with Enoch Saint, who never slept a wink. With him the reactions and repercussions were a prelude to what he was destined to suffer later on in the trenches. To the consideration of what had passed, he brought alert brains, a vivid imagination, and sensibilities happily not bestowed upon the ordinary youth of twenty. To begin with, he knew that Felicity had blurted out the uncompromising truth: he wasn't *everything* to her. He believed her to be everything to him. Probably she was. Who can say? Is there a sage, male or female, who can analyse, dissect, tear to pieces, and put together again that rare and divine emanation, the love of a pure young man for a pure young maid? Love had not been Enoch's portion. His father was an aloof personality, just in his dealings, but incapable of tenderness. His mother had been a chronic invalid since Enoch's birth. What vitality had been in her was spent upon Judith. She had made, unconsciously per-

haps, a favourite of Judith, keeping her in cotton wool. Rightly or wrongly Judith believed that her mother would frustrate (if she could) any marriage. That conviction had justified the short secret engagement. After Judith left home, Mrs. Saint seemed to crawl into a shell. When she came out of it to do her duty as a Christian Wife and mother, she expressed a grievance against life without putting it into words. To put it into words would be wicked. Her treatment of her son had been kindly. But this kindness had aroused expectations of cuddlings and caresses such as were lavished upon Felicity by her mother. As a child, almost up to the time when the Dean took him to London, Mrs. Vye had cuddled him. He rushed to her, not to his mother, when he was in trouble.

Both his parents, after a didactic, do-as-we-tell-you fashion pre-eminently mid-Victorian and clerical, had taught Enoch to repress his feelings. Deliberately they had discouraged friendships with other small boys. That great gift of a surpassingly lovely treble voice had introduced no doubt a complex. When people came from afar to hear him sing: "O, for the wings, the wings of a dove," he was uneasily conscious that wings were indeed lifting him too high above the groundlings.

About the time when Felicity was smiling at herself in her glass, Enoch was slipping out of the Walk, in obedience to the primal instinct of a wounded animal to crawl away and hide. He couldn't think with any sharpness of definition in his own bed because Felicity lay in her bed not thirty yards away. He was trying, poor fellow, to put from him the flesh and blood Felicity, the alluring little witch who had cast her spell upon Young Alf. The same thought flashing into her mind illumined his. She had ceased to be the laughing, joyous school-girl. He had to reckon, whether he liked it or not, with a young woman.

He sought the Cloisters, where thousands of men throughout the centuries had thought of women with no intention other than the determination to put thought of them aside. The Cloisters at Fountains hold many mural tablets and monuments which, long ago, were removed from the nave of the cathedral. One, in particular, had engaged Enoch's interest, because Abel Saint told him a pathetic story about it. During the eighteenth century a lovely lady had married for love a gallant and brilliant gentleman. But they had drifted apart after several years of bickering. The lady died and was buried in the nave of Fountains cathedral. A monument was raised to her memory, which was taken down and re-erected in the cloisters. More than a hundred years afterwards, a descendant wished to find out the exact position of the grave. Nobody could enlighten him. Finally Abel Saint found on one of the walls of the nave certain holes, which, although carefully filled up, corresponded with the clamps of the monument in the cloisters. The grave was found and opened. With the lovely lady—a sweet singer—had been buried a baby. To Enoch, with his vivid imagination, it had seemed a tragedy that such a famous love story had ended so disastrously.

Sitting in the Cloisters, close to this monument, Enoch considered the situation. If he surrendered unconditionally Felicity might take him back. And then the history of the previous day would repeat itself. Inasmuch as he was blessed or cursed with a logical mind, he knew that so long as his engagement remained secret, he would be tortured by attentions paid by others to a girl who did not love him well enough to repulse them. If he refused to surrender, if he imposed on her his terms, she would go her way none the worse for what she would regard as a passing flirtation. Instinct, not experience, confirmed this.

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He felt sure that she had embarked upon a love adventure out of curiosity, and, from the first excitement of the first kiss, she had set about remaking him, entreating him to do this, that and t'other, for her sweet sake. In this pretty civil war between head and heart, head triumphed. Never had he wanted Felicity so desperately as when he decided to put her from him. He may have clung to what he knew to be a straw. If he had misread her character and temperament, if she was what his ardent fancy had conceived her to be, she would whistle him back.

3

She didn't. When they next met, she said lightly: "I believe that everything has turned out for the best, don't you, dear?"

"Yes," he replied, with an assumed indifference which piqued her.

"We remain friends, Enie?"

"Till death us do part."

"I'm sure you're feeling a wee bit cross, aren't you?" Without waiting for his reply, she went on glibly, as if she had rehearsed her lines: "Mum would say that we were just two babies. Now that it's over I can look back and feel that we did have great fun together."

She smiled innocently at him. He was feeling so savage and reckless that he could have struck her, but suddenly his mood changed, as he forgot himself and thought of her. He seemed to be seeing deep into the soul of a child. How wicked, how idiotic to accuse her of heartlessness! And beholding her face grow wistful, he realised that he had power to punish her, if he chose to do it. She would be miserable, poor little thing, if he betrayed his own misery.

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"Yes, yes, Fee, as you say, a bit of harmless fun."

Then he saw that she was on the edge of tears. He must do better than that, or she might suspect. He laughed, amazed that he could do it. How had he managed to hop out of his real self?

He caught her arm and gave it a friendly squeeze.

"Everything is quite all right. Case of 'As you were! Stand easy!'"

She sighed and then smiled gratefully. Her next remark indicated that he had judged her aright.

"I—I suppose we shall really fall in love some day, Enie, with somebody we have never met. I wonder what it will be like. Judith fell in love at sight, didn't she? She told you so. And so did Mr. Wintle. That must be wonderful."

"I expect it is, Fee, the real, right article, whole cloth, no shoddy. Well, when it happens we'll compare notes——"

She interrupted him anxiously, hardly hearing what he had said.

"Mum wondered why you hadn't been in the last two days. Will you drop in after supper for half an hour to-night?"

"Of course I will."

And so, without further ado, the former easy pleasant relations were resumed.

4

At this critical moment in his life, Enoch turned for companionship to Arthur Kerridge, the organist, held by Vicars' Walk to be an encrusted old bachelor past praying for from the feminine point of view. Had he lived in the days of Henry VII he would have been a monk. Enoch thought of him as a monk. It was impossible to accept him as the brother or son of a

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publican. Old Alf, his younger brother, was his antithesis in all things. Arthur was very thin and short-sighted. He could not endure the company of hearty eaters, heavy drinkers, and dullards. His wits were as nimble as his fingers. Long ago he had been accepted by the Walk as a superior person, almost a personage. He had small independent means inherited from his father in lieu of The Open Arms inn; he earned a fair salary supplemented by the giving of music lessons; and was supposed by the gossips to be, like Abel Saint, something of a pincher. In Enoch's too active mind he ranked next to Dean Dyson as an intellectual. Children loved Arthur Kerridge. But, most disconcertingly, he dropped acquaintance with them when they reached puberty. Vicars' Walk affirmed that he was silly about dogs. He would talk to his dog in the presence of ladies, rudely ignoring their presence, verily an unpardonable sin.

He had not dropped Enoch.

This was an immense feather, an oriflamme, in Enoch's cap. Both he and Felicity addressed the organist, by special permission, as Nunkle. Bessie Custard and Willie Hiles spoke of him behind his bowed back as Nunkle but called him "sir" when they spoke to him, which was seldom enough.

Long afterwards Enoch wondered whether Nunkle had noticed anything amiss in his manner or deportment. Nunkle often saw what escaped the longer vision of others, and would then chuckle to himself, refusing to pass remarks.

Under the bludgeonings of Cupid (or Eros), Enoch was contemplating a celibate life and a life aloof from worldlings. He could not say, from personal experience, that spiritual joys exceeded material pleasures; but he believed piously that it might be so. Nunkle never spoke of spiritual joys, laying stress upon the uplifting qualities of the mind, quoting

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a line from a lyric popular before the war: "The mind hath a thousand eyes." He captivated children by telling them stories which he accompanied on the piano or harmonium. In his panelled parlour a small upright piano stood opposite to the harmonium. The piano was known to the children as Punch and the harmonium as Judy. Judith Saint, till she was fourteen, believed that the harmonium had been named after her. Nunkle would say in a joky voice: "Now what will Mr. Punch say to this?" or, in graver tones, "We really must consult Miss Judy." He would dart from one instrument to the other to the delight of the children. But Enoch would forget the Peter Pannish friend who was playing with children and stare at the musician who was playing to himself. When Kerridge played, Enoch believed that he soared into a diviner ether; he left the earth. His rather ugly face became transfigured. Even Judith, not a very imaginative child, had said to Enoch: "Nunkle loves plâying to us."

It is certain that, whether or not Kerridge guessed that Enoch was in grievous trouble, he asked the boy to come to his house and accompanied him on several walks. A walk with Kerridge in and about Fountains was worth while. Concerning the cathedral, he knew nearly as much as the Dean, regarding it as an encyclopædia of Gothic architecture, which it is. But he also knew, from intimate study of ancient tomes, not accessible to the ordinary writer of guide books, the romance and the poetry, the folk-lore and the legends, enshrined in this masterpiece of stone. He could make every sculptured figure on the West Front tell its tale.

Enoch spent many hours with Nunkle, glad to escape from his own thoughts, and glad also to escape from the ever-increasing, inspissated gloom of his own home. Abel Saint, although he never complained

Nunkle

of his physical infirmities, looked ill ; Mrs. Saint was ill. Enoch was impotently aware that he could do nothing for them. Indeed, they encouraged him to pass his evenings elsewhere.

Determined as he was to play the Spartan boy, grimly resolved to suffer in silence, Enoch knew that Nunkle could answer many interesting questions, and he would. He wondered, as all the gossips in Fountains had wondered, whether beneath Nunkle's dry, shrivelled-up exterior, lurked a romantic love-story ? Did Nunkle dislike women because he had suffered at the hands of one ?

Enoch was quick to notice that Nunkle was treating him more as a man and an equal, being ready to discuss subjects hitherto handled either euphemistically or not at all. Nobody dared to tell the organist a questionable story or to swear in his presence. Any small boy, using dirty language in Vicars' Walk, was promptly smacked by his mother, who then proceeded to wash out his mouth with soap and water.

Nunkle, speaking of Bessie to Enoch, used a shocking word.

5

" There are the makings of a harlot in that young woman."

They had passed Bessie and Willie, who were loafing along aimlessly or standing still to exchange pleasantries concerning their fellow-townpeople.

" She's always about with that ne'er-do-well," continued Nunkle, in an aggrieved voice. " You can say what you like about the idle rich, but if you live long enough, my boy, you'll find out that the idle poor will wreck this little island."

" Bessie is no fool," said Enoch.

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"As much can be said of that wastrel. It annoys me that they live under my nose in our Walk, turning it into a cat-walk. If poor old Ambrose knew what she was up to, he'd give up the ghost. Now, because he's half blind and three-quarters deaf, that baggage can do what she pleases."

Enoch pricked his ears, wondering whether Nunkle had resented the smile just bestowed upon him by Miss Bessie. Twice since the expedition to Brenda, she had exchanged greetings with him, and on each occasion he had felt that she was wilfully derisive at his expense. But he wasn't quite sure of this. Anyway, he had failed to respond, and was humiliatingly sensible of his inability to cope with such a cool and smilingly self-possessed young woman. Perhaps she aroused curiosity because she was so different from Felicity.

"What is she up to?" asked Enoch.

"Mischief," replied Nunkle, dourly. "Have nothing to do with the likes of her, my lad."

So he had noticed the smile.

"Mischief?" repeated Enoch.

"Yes, mischief. She'd like to make a fool of you."

Enoch grinned rather sheepishly. He was astonished at this plain speaking. Obviously Nunkle intended to warn him. But that seemed so unnecessary. Wasn't he of an age to take care of himself? Behind a slight resentment, a new and strange satisfaction was percolating slowly through him. Nunkle, after his own fashion, was investing him with the *toga virilis*. Nunkle supposed, not without reason, that his young friend was inexperienced in the ways of women, and on that account likely to fall a victim to the first minx who winked an eye at him. If he knew how his young friend felt about women—all of them—he would change the subject.

Nunkle

"In what way," he asked, "could Bessie, whom I've known all my life, make a fool of me?"

This question gave pause to an elderly man who held with Socrates that it was a heinous offence to debauch the mind of youth. So criminally easy to put wrong ideas into the right head. Half-apologetically he growled out:

"When I was your age, a girl made a fool of me. You are not very unlike what I was at twenty."

This was disarming. Enoch shot a glance at the whimsical face on a level with his own. Nunkle had paid him no compliment. At twenty the organist must have been a shy, gawky, sallow-faced boy, probably extremely self-conscious and miserably aware of an inferiority complex. Subtract about ten stone from Old Alf, and none could make the wildest guess at what he looked like as a young man. Nunkle, despite his wrinkles, had retained the slenderness of figure and the facial contours of youth. Whenever he played, you could catch a glimpse of the eternal youth in him.

Much to Enoch's disappointment, Nunkle said no more, drifting into silence and introspection. Enoch had no doubt that his old friend was back in the eighties and not alone. He could see a youth, not unlike himself, wandering down a lane with a girl at his side. He wondered what sort of girl had appealed to Nunkle's fancy—dark or fair, short or tall, grave or gay? He could also see, not with the mind's eye, that Nunkle was frowning, and decapitating with his cane the dandelions on the Green. When they reached the cathedral the two must part company. Enoch said tentatively:

"I suppose most girls, particularly young girls, think so much of their own good looks that they set altogether too great a value on outward appearance in men."

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Nunkle emerged from his trance, and eyed the boy alertly. Now and again he rebuked his young friend for speaking with a tincture of priggishness ; but he knew that Enoch was no prig, even if he had for his years too great a respect for the nice use of the English language.

"You are mistaken. Wilkes, the ugliest man of his day, said that if he had to compete for a lady's favour against the handsomest buck, all he asked was a start of a quarter of an hour. An ugly wench might be captivated by a barber's block of a man, but the pretty girls surrender to brains."

"Not always."

"Ho ! How the dickens do you know that ? "

"You said just now that a girl had let you down."

Nunkle laughed.

"Not bad, Enoch, not bad. I'm touched, as the fencers say, in the double sense of the word, but you see, without making this talk personal, I'm assuming that the man does exercise his brains. If he loses his head when he loses his heart, as so often happens with young men, why then he's done in. I may tell you my story some day, most certainly not now, as we haven't time, but it's enough to say that I did lose my head. That doesn't invalidate the general argument. Brains win nine times out of ten."

"How ? A man may talk over the girl's head."

Nunkle's eyes twinkled. He was thinking that Enoch must be making this talk personal for reasons not difficult to conjecture. Enoch had been caught by that baggage, Bessie. Bessie, of course, was aware of this. Willie Hiles, confound him ! had good looks and nothing else. Here Nunkle underrated Willie. Anyway Enoch, being such a singularly shy and

genuinely modest youth, would jump to the conclusion that mind would kick the beam if weighed against muscle.

"Then the man is not using his brains but showing off. The man of brains ought to be a judge of character. Your handsome fellow has his big strawberries on the top of the pottle. He is too intent upon showing himself off, attempting, silly ass, to defeat a woman at her own game. Your clever man, handicapped by a plain phiz, disdains frontal attack. He mines and countermines. He insinuates himself into the lady's good graces; he cannot compete with his good-looking rival if he tries to take the fortress by storm. Perhaps his opening gambit is almost invariably the same. He persuades the girl that her wits rather than her looks appeal to him. She is tired of compliments paid to her person; she rises to a fresh fly. Having advanced the pawn of flattery, the player then is careful not to talk about himself. He practises the art of pleasing another, which is, and always has been, the authentic *ars amatoria*."

"Sounds rather underhand, Nunkle, makes me think of Iago."

"Good! I'm glad you can think of Iago. But let me tell you this for what it's worth. Very few young women play fair when they start a love adventure. I don't blame them. You might as well blame a chameleon for taking the colour of its environment. It's a protective instinct. They are out to get, not to give. It's only fair to add that when they surrender, they do give most generously, but I'm speaking of the preliminary sparring. And then the man, if he has brains, fights the woman with her own weapons." He glanced at his watch. "Bless me! I've a bare five minutes to get into my surplice."

Vicars' Walk

6

This walk and talk had taken place on a Sunday afternoon. Nunkle hurried away; Enoch stood still. He had no stomach for a too-familiar ritual, beautiful though he held it to be. He wanted to think over and assimilate what had been said by a clever man who had never till now discussed love and love-making in the boy's presence. Watching Nunkle with children, Enoch had thought to himself scores of times: "Why haven't you children of your own?" He had wondered too, as boys will, why Nunkle seemed to dislike women. He was domestic in his tastes. On the other hand he had the temperament of the artist. According to Nunkle, priests, doctors and artists, or indeed any man who deliberately wanted to give undivided attention and interest to his life's work, whatever it might be, would be happier and of greater service to others, if he remained celibate. Celibates had built the cathedral; celibates had made the Renaissance possible; celibates had preserved what was best in the older civilizations.

Now, watching Nunkle's retreating figure, Enoch could understand and sympathise. Nunkle had frankly admitted that a girl had let him down, which described in words of one syllable what had happened so unexpectedly and devastatingly to himself. It was mighty curious that Nunkle did not blame girls for attempting to get rather than give. *They were like that.* Enoch cherished no rancour against little Felicity. She had been honest with him, when dishonesty might have led to wretched bickerings and misunderstandings.

As Nunkle vanished, Enoch glanced back over his shoulder. Bessie and Willie were still standing at the corner of the Green, idly watching the faithful

Nunkle

placidly strolling into the cathedral. He recalled Nunkle's phrase, "the idle poor."

He filled his pipe as once more his fancy strayed to the wooded hill lying to the east. He wanted to lie down in some tranquil nook and cool off in the shade. He was feeling restlessly hot and irritable. He dared not admit as much, but he was bored, out of tune with his work which at best was not very exciting. He could see ahead a dreary succession of days monotonously the same. Music had been the salvation of Arthur Kerridge. What had he to fall back on? And why, up till now, had he been satisfied with so little? Perhaps, after all, Felicity had been right in urging him to leave Fountains; perhaps—distressful thought!—she had seen him clearly with no more initiative than a limpet; perhaps—and he winced perceptibly—he had lost her because he had subordinated head to heart.

He moved slowly away from a spot very dear to him, between the cathedral and the Palace Gateway. Above the wall beyond the moat he could see the grey roof of the Palace. Often, as child and boy, he had thought of the bishop's ancient house as the castle of the Sleeping Beauty. It belonged to the remote past; it had survived all changes and wars; it slumbered on and on.

He wondered whether he was awakening from too long a sleep. Out of patience with himself, he began to think of Willie Hiles and Young Alf with Bessie between them—the World, the Flesh and the Devil. Did that describe the trio? Or was it too harsh a description? Alf, when Enoch talked alone with him, aped the man of the world, genially cynical, avid for the loaves and fishes, ready to grasp Opportunity in all its Protean forms. Willie, as the idle ne'er-do-well and don't-care-a-damn, had something Mephistophelian about him and something Pannish, slightly pointed

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ears, for example, and eyebrows that curved upwards and outwards. Felicity had spoken of Willie's devilish smile.

Bessie, as Flesh, engrossed his attention as he climbed the hill. He was chivalrous enough to hate to think ill of her. He was sincerely sorry for her as the sole companion of an old man, a lean and slippered pantaloon shambling to the grave. That alone might have soured the ordinary girl. But it hadn't. She remained cheerful and gay, and intensely *alive*. Enoch chuckled; he had caught the right word, the enlightening adjective. Life ebbed and flowed in Bessie's cheeks; life sparkled in her umber eyes, with golden flecks in the iris; life palpitated beneath her small firm breasts; life quickened her light step as she half danced over the cobbles of Vicars' Walk; life, in short, seemed to ooze from every pore of her skin.

He found what he sought: a tiny glade, shut in by oak and ash and holly. It was a famous place for primroses. You reached it by crossing a small field, with stiles at each end of a meandering path. The copse belonged to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Trespassers were warned that they would be prosecuted if they strayed from the path, which was an ancient right of way. This warning served to intimidate trippers, but the townspeople disregarded it.

Enoch lay down upon a mossy bank, not far from the stile. He could see without being seen. His thoughts had now strayed from Bessie to Felicity. This would have been a rare trysting-place, so close to the town and yet so far from its traffics. Instead they had met for the most part in the Gate House library, where a sensitive nostril could detect the whiff of dry-rot and the odour of parchment.

Within a minute or two he became drowsy, listening to the humming bees and the flutings of the warblers.

One of Nunkle's quips amused him as he hovered upon the suburbs of slumber. Nunkle, who studied the habits of birds, said that in April he had found a blackbird who had made use of a last year's nest ; he had also detected a skylark vocalising on the ground instead of in the blue. Nunkle deduced from this that the climate of Fountains must be enervating.

Enoch was closing his eyes, blissfully dozing off, when he heard a cuckoo. The bird, surely, was within twenty yards of him. It might be perched on the stile. He opened his eyes, peering through the bracken. Bessie was leaning against the stile—alone. He saw her lips part. She called again :

“ Cuckoo—cuckoo—— ”

CHAPTER FIVE
A Child of Sin

I

ENOCH jumped up out of the bracken, eyeing Bessie not too pleasantly. She had disturbed more than his slumbers. Peace of mind was imperilled. She must have followed him. Why? Her derisive smile recalled her juvenile mockings and her unkind quips making play with his name. "Here is young Saint! Is he feeling saintly? Has he said his prayers?" Always he thought of some apt reply after she had passed on.

She advanced towards him leisurely, swinging her hat.

"Is this your secret hiding-place?" she asked.

"No. Where's Willie?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Willie? Would you like to try to take the taste of Willie out of my mouth?"

"It amuses you," he replied, "to laugh at me."

"No, no. Aren't you going to invite me to sit down? You are—alone?"

"You saw me take the hill?"

"Yes; and I wondered whether Felicity was waiting for you."

"A peeping puss——!"

She shook a finger at him reproachfully.

"Now, Enie, you must think better of me. With all my faults I'm not a cat. I was joking. I knew that I should find you alone, and I followed you. Why shouldn't we two be friends? We

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have one thing in common—brains. But your brains are so much better than mine. May I sit down ? ”

He nodded ungraciously. Was Nunkle right ? Was this girl attempting to make a fool of him ?

She sat down ; and he seated himself on the same mossy bank, but not too near her, deciding to fight her with her own weapons—which—according to Nunkle—was the right and proper thing to do. She did *not* think that his brains were better than her own.

“ What shall we talk about, Enie ? ”

Her manner disarmed him, but he was still conscious of resentment. He had been challenged. Comparisons between him and Willie were inevitable. Willie was capable of saying : “ There goes young Saint. Nip along after him. See what he’s up to ? Have a game with him.” With this possibility in his mind, he spoke sharply :

“ Let’s talk of a subject of deepest interest to you, Bessie—yourself.”

Once more she lifted a monitory finger.

“ Be good,” she enjoined. “ That was intended to be nasty, but I forgive you. All the same you are right ; I am interested in myself. But can you tell me anything about myself which I don’t know already ? ”

Another challenge. For the first time Enoch smiled. The spirit of mischief in her, whether harmless or not, assailed him. He could see himself as the young man at his ease with a pretty girl, meeting her on equal terms, casting shyness to the void. He admired immensely the Lochinvars whom he met in current fiction. He had the heartiest contempt for the laggards and dastards.

“ Is it true ? ” he asked, “ that your mother was a lady ? ”

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Obviously she was expecting anything but this ; and yet the question pleased her. She held out her hands.

"When I look at my hands I think it likely ; but I don't know. I can't remember my mother ; but I have something belonging to her."

She hesitated. Immediately Enoch felt that he had been impertinent.

"I'm sorry, Bessie. I had no right to ask that question."

"Oh, I don't know. Why not? Coming from you—I—I mean that I should have been cross with Alf Kerridge if he had asked it. He thinks himself a perfect gentleman. That's his weak spot. I don't kid myself that I'm a perfect lady. Shall I tell you what I have belonging to mother besides her hands? And, if I do, will you keep it to yourself?"

"Yes."

"I have a ring."

"A ring?"

"The sort of ring that only a lady would wear, not very valuable, but—give me the right word——"

"Elegant."

"Elegant will do. It is three rings in one, three dear little rings of teeny-weeny diamonds, rubies and emeralds. Before he died, my father gave it me——"

"Do you remember your father?"

"Not too well. He was always away—on tour, I suppose."

She talked on simply about her childhood which had not been unhappy either before or after she came to Vicars' Walk. As she talked, Enoch's hard feelings about her melted away, because, like himself, she had been defrauded of love and tenderness. She exhibited no self-pity. On the contrary, she kept up a rippling

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accompaniment of laughter. Enoch was amazed at her frankness and gaiety, wondering whether she talked as confidentially with Young Alf and Willie Hiles, not to mention others. He was far too young and inexperienced to consider this engaging candour as part of a flirt's *technique*; it had never occurred to him that the surest way to beget confidence is to give it; and—which throws light on what followed—being a modest, unassuming youth, he never suspected that a very clever little baggage was having her way with him, luring him on to bestow confidence on her. However, not being a fool and delightfully free from conceit, he was sensible of a curious intimacy, a mental contact. At sight of her he had expected what he hated—cheap chaff. Instead she was talking as one jolly boy might talk to another.

"Then I got my job; I was so dowdy; I wanted enough money to dress decently. Poor Granfer earns less and less. Our Walk thought it beastly of me, because now he has to get his mid-day meal which, mind you, he rather likes doing. What did you think of my going into a shop?"

"I didn't think; it was none of my business."

This was not strictly true. Enoch had accepted indifferently the common judgment. The Walk contended that Miss Bessie Custard should have given undivided energies to her infirm grandfather. Instead, she had bounced and flounced into one of the new shops, a too garish draper's establishment, where young persons assumed a liberty and license of speech and action regarded both by Close and Walk as highly unbecoming. Felicity Vye had remarked to Enoch that Bessie Custard was a "swank," trying to ape the gentry whom she served much too pertly. But now the more Bessie talked about herself, the more Enoch began to accept her at her own valuation. Nunkle's dreadful word rankled.

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2

They passed a pleasant hour till Bessie flitted away with a wave of the hand. Enoch remained where he was, conscious of exhilaration. He had offered to accompany Bessie, but she had refused his offer laughingly. At the last minute she asked if he was always in the Gate House library from five to seven. Her work was over at six. He guessed that she might drop in upon her way home from the shop, and, although no appointment was made, Enoch had no doubt that they would meet again—and soon.

Well, why not?

He lay flat on his back, inhaling the soft air, and exhaling ill humours. It was good to be alive; it was good to reflect that Bessie was other than what he had deemed her to be. She kept lively company; she was a rebel against moss-encrusted conventions, a Miss Go-as-you-please, but she had behaved with him like a little lady. Enoch considered that description whimsically. In Felicity's mouth it meant decorum. When a young person spoke of herself as a young lady she meant that she permitted no liberties from the rude hand of man; she was not claiming to belong to the gentry. But Bessie, in a bewildering way, had talked as the gentry talked. The Dean was proud of a clever niece who talked to Enoch whenever they happened to meet. She was authentic quality, sure of herself, sure too of him, knowing that he would never presume to take advantage of her friendliness. Bessie had something of her easy way, and certain inflections in her voice which provoked that indiscreet question: "Was your mother a lady?"

He tried to recall what he had heard about Bessie's father. The Walk knew that he had been an unsuccessful provincial actor, who had cut loose, rather heartlessly, from his father. Old Ambrose never

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mentioned him. But the gossips affirmed that there was no mystery underlying this silence. Old Ambrose never mentioned anybody. He had an uncanny gift of silence ; he acknowledged greetings in the street with a dignified inclination of the head ; chatterboxes made sure that he was a profound thinker.

Having imagination and sympathy Enoch could picture Bessie alone with her grandfather. He could see her, as a child, romping up and down the Walk, playing with other children. He and she were of the same age, but, even as children, they had seen little of each other. She was the naughty girl ; he was the good boy.

Could he blame her for having mocked him ? What a poor, sickly, ugly imp he must have appeared to her.

And who was he to throw a stone at her, because she went pillion-riding ?

He returned to Vicars' Walk refreshed and re-invigorated.

3

It may be taken for granted that Bessie could whet expectation even as a mower whets his scythe. For reasons of her own she made up her mind to capture Enoch, well aware that he was a shy fish not likely to rise at the first cast. Her tentative efforts in the Brenda Gorge had served one purpose, differentiating him from the other young men of her acquaintance. The ordinary wiles did not beguile him. But she had none of the fury of the woman scorned. Indeed she was angry with herself, not him, when he refused before the others to share the proffered strawberry. Would he have refused to share it had they been alone ?

Next day Enoch expected to see her shortly after closing time. In June and July the library was little used. That meant a few extra shillings a week, because

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the librarian was free to type out what he had taken down in shorthand during the morning. Also there were diggings and delvings into ancient tomes, a labour of love to Enoch apart from what the Dean paid him. The Dean was undertaking an anecdotal history of Fountains Cathedral. No man in the kingdom was better equipped for such a difficult and delicate task. Nobody as yet had attempted anything of the sort. The Dean contemplated a book which would challenge the interest of the ordinary reader. Much had been written about the cathedral and most of it dry-as-dust stuff. The guide books told the tourist that the history of this miracle in stone was set down in stone on the Western Front. But many of the figures, representing real persons, had been defaced by time. Apart from those which dealt with Biblical subjects and persons, there were images of famous men and women from the time of King Ina up to the date of the completion of the Front. The Dean was concerned with these statesmen and churchmen. He wanted, in fine, to embody a suggestion made by one writer that these figures had been placed in their niches not merely for decorative purposes, but to teach the history of the cathedral to those who could neither read nor write. And this involved a labour nearly as great and quite as painstaking as the carving and setting up of the images.

Upon the evening of the third day Enoch heard Bessie running up the stone stairs. Felicity had walked. But Enoch made allowance for maternal injunctions. He could hear Mrs. Vye saying: "Now Fee, don't you ever run to meet a man; let him run, dear, to meet you." Bessie burst in, slightly flushed.

"Here I am, Enie. What luck to find you alone!"

She did not offer to shake hands as he stood staring at her roguish face. Was it Meredith who had written of a rogue in porcelain? Bessie looked a rogue in pottery, very human clay.

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"Glad to see me?" she asked. "Isn't it dull here? You're working for the Dean, aren't you? Tell me about your work. I haven't run up those stairs to talk about myself."

She perched herself on the edge of the refectory table and laughed. As Enoch put together some loose sheets of typing, she rattled on:

"This is the table at which the Vicars Choral dined, isn't it?"

"They were called singing men then."

"Do you think I'm worthy to sit on this old table?"

"I think you'd be more comfy in a chair."

She glanced at three folios.

"Who reads those?"

"I do. You see I'm hunting snippets for the Dean. It's not bad fun, rather like fishing in the moat for eels. The Dean calls them slippery slinks."

"Slippery slinks?"

"They have slipped from the attention of other writers."

"That's your idea of fun?"

"You see it's fun to me, because the Dean gives me a free hand. I dig out everything likely to interest him, and then he selects what he wants."

Bessie opened the nearest folio, glanced at a page, and uttered an exclamation.

"I can't make head or tail of it."

"It's Latin, mediæval Latin."

"Enie—! You can read Latin?"

"Fairly well."

"They used to call you the Wonder Boy. I call you the Wonder Man. Latin! Can you read Greek?"

"No."

"French?"

"No."

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"Yes, I know."

"Of course you do. I'd forgotten that you and Alf were friends. Why are you his friend?"

"Why are you?"

"Perhaps for the same reason you are. Alf is a good sort, nothing of the country bumpkin about him. He's generous too, always ready to pay his share and more than his share. Smart—no humbug. But, mind you, I wouldn't trust him a yard."

Enoch nodded, impressed by Bessie's cool summing-up of an attractive fellow.

"He hasn't your brains," continued Bessie, "and he hasn't your looks."

"Shut up!" said Enoch angrily. "You say you hate humbug; so do I."

"I was going to explain," cooed Bessie. "Gracious! How hot you get! Alf is handsome; but he looks common. One day he'll be as fat as his father, a tub of a man. Ugh! Why did his lordship ask you in to the Palace for tea? 'Cos he mistook you for a young gentleman. Would he ask Alf? Never. And that's what I mean when I say that Alf hasn't your looks. Anyway, if you were what you look like, you wouldn't be so rude as to tell me to shut up."

"I'm sorry, Bessie. I—I hate my own face."

"All right, Enie. Now, see here, I can't stay long, but I've something to show you."

To his surprise she began to undo the top of the neat little shirt which she was wearing with the tight skirt of that day. When she came in he had noticed how trim she looked. She pulled aside a tie, undid two buttons, and fished out her mother's ring which hung on a thin chain. Enoch had a glimpse of her soft white flesh, no more, but it sufficed to bring a tinge of red into his sallow cheeks. To cover his confusion, he bent his head to examine the ring.

"I won't bother to take it off. I had it round my

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neck on this very chain when Granfer brought me here."

"It is a lady's ring," said Enoch. "Why don't you wear it?"

"I—I don't know you well enough to tell you."

Her voice faltered, as she turned aside her head, not meeting his eyes. She replaced the ring and buttoned up her shirt. Enoch remained silent.

"If—if I did tell you," she went on after a pause, "you might think worse of me than you do; and I should hate that."

The colour in the boy's cheeks deepened.

"Why do you say such things? You aren't fishing for a cheap compliment, are you?"

"No," she snapped. "I know what the old cats in our Walk say about me. And your fine friend, Mister Arthur Kerridge, hates me. I love shocking him. For two two's, I'd put my tongue out when we pass. He's an acid drop. Now I'm talking common 'cos I feel common when I think of him. He excites everything bad in me." Her voice softened again as she continued: "I told you that ring was all I had of my mother's. Now you've seen it, does it make you think of anything else?"

"No. Why should it?"

"You can ask that again when we're real friends."

"Bessie, I want to be your friend."

"Honest?"

"Honest."

"Shake on it?"

She held out her hand, which he took and held for a moment. He heard her little trickling laugh and at the same instant a heavy footstep below. Bessie spoke first in a whisper.

"Get on with your work."

An elderly man came in, nodded to Enoch, and took no notice of Bessie, who appeared to be engrossed in a book.

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4

The elderly man happened to be a Levite, the stonemason, George Sumshion. Enoch had reason to suppose that George, a dexterous worker in stone, and a lover of stone, could only read with difficulty, and seldom attempted to write more than his name. Nevertheless he used the library, rich in works of reference, and studied architectural plates. He liked to browse about ; and he enjoyed chats with Enoch.

Meanwhile Enoch went on with his work, stealing now and again a glimpse at Bessie, who never moved. Bessie might have aptitudes for the stage, inherited aptitudes. Then he recalled Felicity's astonishing performance. Presumably all women were actresses. He wondered whether Bessie was lingering on in the hope that George Sumshion would leave. George would remain till seven.

Presently Bessie, carrying the book in her hand, approached Enoch.

"I must go, Enoch," she said plaintively. "Can't I take this book with me? I know it's against the rules, but you do make exceptions, don't you? And if I vow and declare solemnly that I'll bring it back to-morrow evening about this time, anyway between six and seven, will you say 'yes.' Do, please!"

"All right, Bessie. But you must sign a form." Bessie signed a form.

"Good-night, Enoch, and thank you ever so much. Good-night, Mr. Sumshion."

"Good-night, Bessie," said old George.

As soon as Bessie had gone, the stonemason took a chair near Enoch and cleared his throat. He was one of the few men living in Vicars' Walk who used the dialect, being indeed racy of the soil. He took liberties with the pronouns, turned an occasional "s" into a "z," and an "f" into a "v."

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"I would'n a-trusted Bessie, Enoch."

"Oh, yes, you would, Mr. Sumshion."

The old fellow chuckled, rubbing together his gnarled hands.

"A rare vavoured lil wench, but I knawed her vather, I did. You show me quarry, an' I'll tell 'ee quality o' stone out of it."

He went on chuckling.

Enoch had great respect for old George, honourably known as "Honest George"; and—by an odd coincidence—that very morning the Dean, dictating to Enoch, had said: "An honest craftsman is generally an honest man; this is especially true, so far as my own experience goes, of stonemasons; and I think I can go further and affirm that good workers in stone are good judges of character with a sound appreciation of the enduring qualities in human relationships."

Strange! Passing strange!

Enoch had typed this paragraph a few minutes before Bessie appeared. He was sure that the Dean must have been thinking of George Sumshion when he dictated it.

However, Enoch, being very young and handicapped by his book-acquired cleverness, listened to the stonemason as he had listened to the organist—with mental reservations. They were old men. And, quite recently, coincident with the "rampagings" of the suffragettes, age in Vicars' Walk had become cantankerously critical of youth. When the war was over, when youth marched triumphantly and vaingloriously into a kingdom of its own, Enoch, five years older and five and twenty years wiser, wondered whether age had foreseen its *débâcle*? Age might have felt gropingly that youth was about to be a law unto itself, about to reject the wisdom of the ages and sages. It might be so. At any rate, Enoch decided that he must shiver a lance on behalf of Bessie.

"Our Walk is rather hard on Bessie Custard."

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Mr. Sumshion considered this with his head slightly on one side. He looked as if he were inspecting a doubtful stone, one that might disintegrate under sharp frost.

"Cobbles in Vicars' Walk. Cobbles for wear an' tear. I be an old cobble, Enoch."

"A sharp old flint when you talk about Bessie."

"Enoch, me lad, if I'd a-knawed Bessie was a friend o' yourn I'd a-held my tongue, yes, I would."

Enoch hesitated.

"It's like this. I have no right, none, to call myself Bessie's friend. We weren't friendly as children. She made fun of me, but I bear her no ill will for that. I sit here and I read a lot, and I think a lot——"

"Ah-h-h-h. Wise for your years you be."

"I'm not wise ; and somehow I feel that I'm learning rather than living. Perhaps Bessie is living rather than learning."

"More'n likely."

"But I ask you—has she ever had a fair chance ? Don't you think it must be desperately dull for her living alone with old Ambrose ?"

"Ah well, you means that living with old Ambrose fair drove her to go a-pillion-riding with young Alf and that there Willie Hiles."

"I think that if Bessie had a mother like Mrs. Vye, she would be more like Felicity."

"No, no—not same quality o' stone."

He chuckled, ruminating and chewing the cud of Enoch's remarks. Enoch went on :

"Not same quality, you say. I've been thinking about that too. Her granfer is a scrivener, the son of a scrivener. His granfer, so my father says, was a lawyer——"

The stonemason shook his head sadly ; he distrusted lawyers. But Enoch had arrested his attention. He put a hand to his ear, conveying the flattering

A Child of Sin

impression that he must not miss a word, saying approvingly :

"Rare talker you be."

"Thanks. You're a rare listener. I admit that I'm practising on you, Mr. Sumshion. And I want to know how you'll take what I've got to say. I—I couldn't talk to my father as I talk to you. He's too set in his ways. Quality now. You mean one thing about that word; and he means another. Quality to father is another word for gentry." Mr. Sumshion nodded, intent upon Enoch's face, wondering why the boy was so excited. "Now, you know and I know that the Vyes and the Saints are not gentry and never have been gentry. We don't pretend to want what they want."

"I sometimes wonders if they rightly knows what they do want, a-traipsin' here, there an' everywhere."

"Unrest is in their blood, but it isn't in ours. For generations it's been licked into us that we're to take with humble and grateful hearts what they choose to give us."

The stonemason stirred uneasily. This sounded like Radical talk, *miching mallecho*. Enoch guessed his thoughts.

"I'm not a Rad, Mr. Sumshion. But—between you and me—what's been bred in my bone stays there. It hasn't yet come out in the flesh. It's the staying still where you are, where your people have always been, that tickles me. I hope to stand in my father's shoes some day, to live in our old house, to live in Fountains - -"

"I understand tha-at, me lad. Very right an' proper I says."

"Yes; and our Walk would say the same. But the gentry don't feel that way, and we—if we think about it at all—touch our caps to 'em, because we expect them to lead, to show the way, and -don't forget this—we expect 'em to take chances, run risks that we don't run."

"There's a mort o' truth in what you says."

Vicars' Walk

"Now suppose that Bessie Custard has a lot of gentry in her. Is it surprising that she wants to traipse about, to take chances, to—to run risks? And don't you think that a girl like that, clever, full of life, is likely to come to grief if men like you refuse to make allowances for her? Give a girl like that the name, and she'll take the game. If—if she is on the devil's road, aren't the older and wiser folk in Vicars' Walk hounding her along it when they tell her to her face that she's no better than she ought to be."

Mr. Sumshion was profoundly impressed.

"You've a-got the gift o' words," he exclaimed.

"I'm sorry for poor little Bessie."

"Well, well, well! I knawed her vather; and if I'd a-knawed her mother, why then I might say something wuth a-listenin' to. As 'tis, I says this: I knaw what I knaws; and Bessie Custard bain't quality even if her be gentry. But I, for one, won't lift up my voice against she. My word on that."

No more was said.

5

Next afternoon, at the same time, Bessie returned the borrowed book with a significant wink.

"Good biz, wasn't it?"

"You played your part cleverly."

Again Bessie seated herself on the refectory table, swinging her legs and clicking together the heels of her small shoes.

"Restless creature, you are," said Enoch.

"I'd love to fly, wouldn't you?"

"I—I don't believe that we were intended to fly, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you such a silly question. *Intended!* That's your old Walk. But you're not an echo."

A Child of Sin

"Echo was a nymph, Bessie."

"Oh, blanie the poor girl! Now, see here, Enie, this may sound to you a sort of blasphemy, but I don't believe that Vicars' Walk knows what God intends—"

"Do you think Dean Dyson knows?"

"I don't fall asleep when he's preaching. But sometimes——"

"Yes?"

"I've a notion that he preaches what he believes is good for *us*. That's my own little idea, which I hand on to you 'cos we're friends. We are friends, aren't we? You haven't thought better of that?"

"We are friends."

"We may fall out, if we think differently. And, likely as not, I'll shock you. You haven't forgot what I said about my mother's ring. Do I know you well enough to tell you why I showed it to you?"

"That's for you to decide——"

Again she hesitated, fidgeting with her hands.

"I'll risk it," she declared. "Come up here; sit beside me."

He did so willingly enough, sensible that she looked and was troubled. Her voice quavered as she began:

"Father bought that ring, but my mother chose it. I'm sure that when Father died, he had been out of work for some time. I daresay he needed money; but he never sold that ring; and, as I told you, he hung it round my neck. But, Enie, why weren't there two rings?"

"Two rings?"

"Yes; the engagement ring and the wedding ring?"

He grasped her meaning swiftly.

"Bessie——!"

"Wait! Why does Granfer never speak of my mother to me? And why, when Granfer brought me here, did Mrs. Vye and your mother, and nearly all

Vicars' Walk

the women look at me so queerly? Somehow, although I was such a kiddy, I knew that I was a surprise. They didn't know that father had married——”

She broke off with a gulp.

“Why should they know?”

“I—I haven't finished. Granfer has a family Bible. He keeps it in a Bible-box; and now the box is locked. One day, about two years ago, he caught me staring at the front page, covered with illustrations. *Vicars' Walk* would love it, so right, so just right. You begin with two babies, perfect pets. They are sitting in a cradle opposite to each other, crowing at each other. Then you see a picture of them as children, boy and girl. Next, man and maid adoring each other. Oh, it's all much too good to be ever true. Then you see them being married, kneeling before the parson. He's blessing them. Then you see them with the first baby—adoring it. After that more scenes of married life—everything just right, everything just what doesn't happen in real life. And then, at the very end, you see them, these two darlings, walking hand in hand into what looks like a beautiful temple—the family tomb. And last of all, you see them young and lovely again, with wings, Enie, floating up and up to where, I suppose, the angels are casting down their golden crowns before the glassy sea!”

To his distress, she gave a bitter laugh.

“For God's sake, don't laugh, Bessie. It—it may be like that. Who knows? And it may have been like that when the world was younger and happier——”

“Never——!”

“We—we don't know——”

“I know.”

“How do you know?”

A Child of Sin

"I tell you the world's full of miserable sinners; and I'm sure my mother was one of them."

"It's awful to hear you say that."

"I can prove it——"

"You can't."

"I think I can. Opposite to this front page is another page, a pedigree page. It's covered with names—all the Custards for the last one hundred and thirty years, beginning with the one who bought the Bible. Is my name there at the very end? No. Granfer's name is there, and my father's name in Granfer's beautiful handwriting. No mention of my mother or me."

"Your grandfather forgot to make the entry."

"He set down the date of father's death. Well, he saw me staring at that page. He moved away without saying a word. Next day, the Bible-box was locked."

"Bessie," said Enoch helplessly; "I don't know what to say to you."

"There is nothing to say. I'm what the Walk calls a child of sin. Do you want to have a child of sin for a friend?"

"Yes—yes—yes."

"Oh, Enie, I do like you; you - you are a dear boy."

Tears were in her eyes; tears began to roll down her flushed cheeks. He put his arm about her and kissed her delicately and reassuringly. She did not kiss him, but leant her head against his shoulder, sighing.

Voices below made them leave the table. They listened. The voices died away.

"George Sumshion may come up," said Enoch. "Nobody else on such a lovely evening."

"How heavenly it would be on the hill," she whispered. "Will you be there next Sunday, Enie?"

"I'll take you there."

Vicars' Walk

"You are Enoch Saint ; I'm Bessie Custard. The Walk forbids ; the Walk thinks the worst of everybody ; the Walk doesn't believe in friendship between a young man and a young woman."

"I want to be your friend ; I'm not ashamed of being your friend."

"We must do nothing hastily. On Sunday, same time as last Sunday, I shall be at the stile. If you are not there, I shall understand. If you are there we can talk over everything quietly, like—like sensible people."

Before he could frame an answer she had gone.

CHAPTER SIX

'Disillusionment

I

ENOCH did no work after Bessie left him, telling himself that it beloved him to think things over, unhappily conscious that calm, lucid thinking was unattainable.

Within a month he had kissed two girls . . . !

To the youth of to-day this is a ha'penny matter. But in 1914, good boys did not kiss good girls for the mere fun of it. Enoch had exchanged kisses with Felicity believing that she was his and he was hers now and hereafter. On the evening of that wonderful day, had he chanced to see the illustrated front page of the scrivener's Bible, he would have beheld in those twin souls made each for the other, replicas of Felicity and himself. Out of a romantic dream he had been rudely awakened. Left shivering alone on the bleak mountain tops of reality, he contemplated celibacy and other abstentions. Nevertheless his mind lingered upon the sweetness of Felicity's lips.

Had he been less honest, or less intelligent, he might have salved a too sensitive conscience by pretending to himself that he had kissed Bessie out of pity, and because she expected something of the sort. But the moment his lips touched her soft cheek, he was conscious of the same unmistakable thrill which, when he first kissed Felicity, he, poor fool, had taken to be a sign from heaven that his love for a pure maid was approved and sanctified. He hardly dared to think what would have happened had Bessie returned that friendly, fraternal kiss.

She hadn't.

Vicars' Walk

She had accepted it as a seal of friendship. Probably—he writhed at the thought—he was the sort of young man who could inspire friendship but not love. He refused to believe that he was falling in love with Bessie; attractive though she was; he could not envisage her as replacing Felicity. No, no, ten thousand times no. Bessie appealed to his head. Any other appeal from her must be crushed.

How sorely she needed a true friend!

But, like Felicity, she was imposing on him secrecy.

This bothered him terribly. And again excess of imagination, excess of intelligence, ran riot, because there was no experience to control it. He was now self-constituted, self-pledged, to be Bessie's friend and champion. He believed that mental contact had been established, yes, mental intimacy. Whatever her relations might have been with Young Alf or Willie Hiles—and he believed them to be innocent enough—he was ready to stake his life that she had not spoken to them about the family Bible in its locked box.

Suppose, so his thoughts ran, that he took the initiative, and was seen openly with her? He could refuse to continue friendship except on those terms. If Vicars' Walk talked, let them talk——! Then he wondered vaguely what the Dean would say? Arthur Kerridge might drop him. Finally he swooped upon his parents.

2

He met them that night at supper after a talk with Young Alf, who had proposed genially a gin and bitters which Enoch refused. Alf ceased to be genial as soon as he found himself alone with Enoch.

"I wanted a talk with you."

"What about?"

"Private personal affairs. You look as wise as an

Disillusionment

owl ; I feel a silly ass. Enie, my lad, I'm in a hole. Up to my neck in trouble, ole man."

"Never saw you look better," growled Enoch.

"You say that as if my looks gave you the pip."

"They do," replied Enoch, with a burst of frankness.

"In your case I daresay the Devil keeps a fatherly eye on a favourite child."

Alf grinned.

"Enie, you're coming on. I'm damned if you aren't the queerest duck in this town. With one or two under your waistcoat, you'd be the limit. If I could talk as you do, I'd go into Parliament."

"Into gaol more likely. What's the trouble?"

"I've been backing losers."

"You ask a bit too much of Fortune——"

"Eh?"

"A winner must expect to lose sometimes."

"I can't go to Dad."

"Why not?"

Alf explained at length. He had promised his father to abstain from betting ; he had made other promises—all broken. Enoch, brought up to reckon debt as a deadly sin, was confounded by Alf's moral lapses. Abel Saint had called him a moral idiot. Bessie had said that she wouldn't trust him a yard. Alf, it seemed, was in debt to half a dozen tradesmen and a local bookmaker who was being "nasty."

"Debts of honour must be paid," said Alf. "If you lent me twenty pounds, ole man, you'd get your money back if I had to rob the home till."

"What beats me," said Enoch slowly, "is your attitude. According to your own story you've lied to your father, broken half a dozen solemn pledges, and you look, and I believe feel, as if you hadn't a care in the world."

Alf went on grinning.

"I've a soft heart, Enie. It's bleeding at this

Vicars' Walk

minute when I think of how the other fellow is worrying. Would it help me to worry with him? But, look you here, I'm scared stiff of one thing. The old governor is just hanging on to life, because he hates to die. A bad jolt would topple him over. I love the old Dad. I'd hate to give him that jolt."

Enoch knew this to be true; but it made the situation even more inexplicable. In Vicar's Walk love implied consideration. Waste of time to point this out to Alf.

"I haven't twenty pounds," said Enoch, "and if I had I wouldn't lend them to you, because you might rob your own father to pay me back."

Alf was delighted, and patted his friend on the back.

"That's fine. Now, Enie, you're thick as thieves with Uncle Artie. There is, as you may know, a coolness between the old bird and me, and he's Dad's only brother. If you asked Uncle Artie to help me for Dad's sake, and if you put the case as you can put it, why, I say it's a thousand to three that he'd dig up this small amount."

"I'd sooner ask my own father to lend me the money."

"Gosh! Why not?"

After more talk Enoch yielded to importunity. Knowing his father, he feared a refusal, but he believed, like everybody else, that his father was well-to-do. Alf, impassioned optimist, was jingling the money in his pocket, as he said ardently:

"You're a topper, one of the best. I wish I could do something for you."

"You can."

"Fine! Give it a name."

"Bessie Custard."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'm worried about Bessie. She—she, I hate to say it, especially to you, but she has, well, cheapened

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herself a bit with you, and Willie Hiles, and one or two others."

"Bessie likes a bit o' fun. Clicked with you, has she?"

"Alf, I'm serious. Don't cut any cheap jokes about this. I'd like to see Bessie less restless and - and reckless. I can talk to her; she can talk to me. Is that what you mean by clicking?"

"Oh, I dunno'. What does Miss Felicity Vye say?"

Enoch flushed. In the slightly priggish manner that had provoked ribaldry in the past he asked primly:

"What has Felicity to do with this?"

Alf hesitated, glancing at Enoch's flushed cheeks, puzzled, curious, but amused.

"I thought, correct me if I'm wrong, that you and that blessed lamb——"

"You *are* wrong."

"Ho! I'll play swops, Enie."

"Swops?"

"Yes. No complaints if you walk out with Bessie. On the contrary—congrats, ole man. She's rare good company. Any objections if I walk out with Fee?"

Taken aback, Enoch stared in dismay at Alf's jolly, beaming face.

"Can't see her with you," he muttered crossly.

"Maybe you will; maybe you won't. That isn't on this bill of fare. You're my pal; I wouldn't sneak your girl if you told me she was your girl."

"She isn't."

"Fine! Now we know where we are. As the French say, I may have to range myself, *planter mes choux*."

"Do I see virtue in Harry's looks?"

"What the hell d'ye mean by that?"

"You talk a language I don't understand; I reply with a *quid pro quo*. I hope you will settle down.

Vicars' Walk

I ask you as my friend: is there any reason why I shouldn't make a friend of Bessie Custard?"

"None that I know of."

A minute later they parted.

3

In Vicars' Walk Mrs. Saint had the reputation of being a good housekeeper, which means in lower middle class circles the gift of making sixpence do duty for a shilling, a gift not bestowed upon Mrs. Vye. Enoch often wondered whether his mother could ever have felt young or would ever look old. Perhaps she had made a bargain with Father Time. In the panelled parlour, which gentlemen interested in early architecture paid silver to see because built up in the spandrel of a window arch was a sculptured ornament of the thirteenth century, hung an enlarged photograph of Mrs. Saint taken shortly before her marriage, a tinted specimen, handsomely framed and glazed. Mrs. Vye declared it to be the dead spit of the sometime schoolmistress. Enoch, barely ten when he overheard this declaration, wondered whether you were intended to spit when you saw it. He hated it without being able to assign any reason other than its dissimilarity to another enlarged photograph of Mrs. Vye who looked a perfect duck. Mrs. Vye's large heart had enfolded Enoch because he made a much repeated remark about this photograph. Felicity, then seven, was standing in front of it with Enoch. Mrs. Vye heard her daughter say: "Isn't Mum sweet?" When Enoch assented, Felicity asked an indiscreet question. "Don't you wish Mum was your Mum?" Enoch replied: "No. I wish she was my wife." Vicars' Walk acclaimed this as being worthy of a wonder boy.

Disillusionment

Mrs. Saint, when she married, looked very much as Mrs. Vye described her, disconcertingly angular, disconcertingly maidenly, disconcertingly calm. The Dean used the adjective "desiccated."

At supper Enoch recalled once more Bessie's description of the illustrated page in the Bible, as it occurred to his too lively fancy that his parents, after their own fashion, had something grotesquely in common with the "two darlings" walking together hand in hand into the tomb. He was sure that one would not long survive the other. They had lived together for a quarter of a century without bickerings. Enoch knew they had kept company for three years without any outward sign of an inward love. Upon the day when Abel Saint kissed Lily Bissell for the first time, she consented to be his wife-- --!

After his duties for the day were over Abel Saint put on a skull-cap. With it he assumed a certain majesty of deportment, a patriarchal dignity. Mr. Vye, in moments of depression, had to admit that the senior verger's apostolic appearance was worth at least an extra hundred pounds a year in tips, probably more. He had seen with his own eyes (he begged to inform you) the effect of a silky, silvery beard upon cheeky, blatant, bank-holiday trippers. He had seen (if you please) Abel Saint take between finger and thumb a ha'penny and drop it into the alms-box near the famous clock; he had seen (metaphorically) the miserable wretch who had dared to bestow copper upon the senior verger disintegrate into nothingness, or (if you know what I mean) expire in agony on the spot!

During supper it was Abel Saint's habit to ask Enoch questions concerning his clerical work with the Dean. Had Enoch given satisfaction? This questioning was not perfunctory, inasmuch as the senior verger loyally supported the autocrat of the Close, and held

Vicars' Walk

him, quite rightly, to be a Supreme Being. Abel Saint hoped that he might live to see the publication of Dean Dyson's *magnum opus*; he could discuss its slow progress technically. Again and again, he told his son where to look for information; again and again Enoch had to deliver polite messages from the Dean thanking his old *friend* for kindly hints and suggestions.

During these talks Mrs. Saint ministered silently to her two men. She now regarded Enoch as a man. Although Judith had inherited her looks from her father, whereas Enoch "favoured" the distaff side, the girl had been dearer to the mother than the son. Enoch knew this, but, as compensation, he also knew that he was dearer to his father than Judith.

After supper, father and son were left alone. Enoch had decided that bush-beating might defeat its ends.

"Father——"

"Yes, my son?"

"Could you lend me twenty pounds?"

Abel Saint recalled Enoch in the grey flannel suit. He said calmly:

"You are in debt?"

"No."

"You want this large sum of money for some honourable purpose?"

"You might not think so."

Abel removed his skull-cap, and passed a thin hand across his domed brow. Enoch heard him mutter "slap-dash." He dared not laugh at his august sire, but he saw the humorous side of the situation. He also perceived, which touched him, that his father eyed him kindly, rather as he eyed youthful trippers who asked ridiculous questions.

"Possibly," said Abel Saint, replacing his cap, "you are thinking of buying a motor-cycle?"

"No. My old push-bike is good enough for me.

Disillusionment

"It's like this, sir," he paused, suppressing a smile, because the use of the formal "sir" had instant effect, before he went on suavely: "I don't want this money for myself, but for a friend and he—you can take my word—will pay it back."

"So he says, no doubt."

"If he doesn't, I will pay it back when the Dean settles up with me."

Old Abel nodded. In the bosom of his family he had acquired the habit of thinking aloud, quite unconscious of what Enoch held to be an engaging trick. He pursed up his lip, allowed a frown to flit across his shiny forehead, and murmured: "Good-boy—good-boy—no fool, thank God."

Enoch waited. Hearing a rustle behind him, he turned his head. Mrs. Saint had come in. Obviously she had not come to stay. She glided across the room, a wraith-like figure, very frail, but still quick in her movements.

"Mother——"

"Yes, Abel?"

"Enoch has asked me to lend him twenty pounds, ter-venty pounds. Not for himself, but for a friend whose name, apparently, he is not at liberty to mention." Mrs. Saint nodded, betraying no surprise. "Shall I lend this money to him?"

"Oh, yes, if it's convenient."

"It's never convenient to lend money."

"I can let him have it, if he wants it."

Abel closed his eyes. Out of the patriarchal beard floated whispers; "Can't permit that—no, no—certainly not."

"I'll lend you this money, Enoch. You shall have a cheque to-morrow morning."

"Oh, sir, this is most awfully good and kind of you."

"No, no, you are a good boy, a good son. I am happy to oblige you."

Vicars' Walk

4

Engrossed with the pressing business of another, Enoch had almost forgotten Bessie, but she came dancing back into his mind as soon as Alf's business was done. The fact that it had been done so easily, without friction, on his father's part (and his mother's) with such trust and confidence, provoked qualms. He told himself that he could not be friends with Bessie in a clandestine, underhand way. Meanwhile Mrs Saint had returned to the kitchen. She employed by the day a young woman habitually spoken of as the "gurl." This "help" did not sleep in the house. Enoch did not know her name. She arrived about the time when he was due at the Deanery; she left after the supper washing-up. When she left, Mrs. Saint would complete the isosceles triangle. This was another quip of the Dean's. He saw Enoch as the base of the triangle. From this base soared the twin sides, forming in all a spire.

Comfortably tiled in with his parents, Enoch wondered how he could present Bessie, as he saw her, to two persons who for some time had pretended not to see poor Bessie at all. For them she didn't exist.

He began lamely.

"Do you think, Father, that a young fellow can be—a—*friendly*," he brought out the adverb with a jerk, "with a young girl about his own age without—without, you know, any sentimental—a—philandering?"

"No, my son, no."

"Yes," said Mrs. Saint.

This was comic, but Enoch was not looking for comedy. Sometimes he wondered whether his mother deliberately disagreed with her husband, knowing that he loved a little argument, and loved even more getting the best of it and her.

Disillusionment

"I speak out of the fullness of my own experience, Mother."

"So do I, Abel."

"We came together as friends, Lily, friends. We were, possibly, each of us, too engrossed with our daily tasks, we needed relaxation which we found in each other's company. We agreed to meet as friends without—without—what did you call it, Enoch?"

"Sentimental philandering."

"Just so. And what happened? In less than a year I knew and your mother knew—for she admitted as much afterwards—that friendship had degenerated into a mere flimsy excuse for being together. Am I right, or am I not?"

Abel closed his eyes, awaiting surrender. Enoch's sharp ears caught more mutterings; "Defeated—not a leg to stand on, poor soul!" But Mrs. Saint replied gently:

"Before our friendship began, Abel, I was friends with two other men. Just friends, dear, nothing more. They didn't ask for more, and nor did I. You might have had a similar experience, but your friends were men."

Enoch began to forget Bessie again. These domestic details were so illuminating. He made a sustained effort to see his parents as they had been five and twenty years ago, but even then they had ceased to be young. Had they ever been young?

"Wait, Lily, wait. When I was Enoch's age, I made friends with a girl, which ended as all such affairs do end."

"You fell in love with her, Abel? You—you never told me——"

"I did not fall in love with her. She fell in love with me. Inasmuch as she is dead and I am an old man, but not—not an old fool, Lily, I can be outspoken. She fell in love with me."

Vicars' Walk

"What did you do, Father?" asked Enoch.

"I did not respond," said Abel bleakly. "I may add, as a passing sidelight upon human nature, that within a month she had found another man who did."

Mrs. Saint smiled faintly.

Once more Enoch was nerving himself to speak more plainly, when a bomb fell. After the war he thought of it as a bomb, big enough to bury half a dozen men when it burst, a Black Maria.

"Your dear mother and I know why you have raised this question. We have eyes and ears. We are agreed that you and little Felicity Vye ought to be more than friends and playmates. She is young, yes, and so are you, but it steadies a young fellow—to anchor himself to a worthy young woman. When you took Felicity to Brenda we guessed; we had a little chuckle over it. Yes; we heard a peal of bells. We agreed that you had chosen wisely. We are pleased, my son, very, very pleased."

Enoch realised that he was buried alive.

5

The accursed irony of it——!

If Felicity and he had marched, hand in hand, from the Gate House library into the room where he and his parents were now sitting, Abel Saint would have risen up to bless them. And then—he could picture the scene—there would have been a sort of procession into the next house, the senior verger leading the way. He could see himself, feel himself, taken to Mrs. Vye's ample bosom, accepted thankfully (and piously) as her own dear good boy, and a few feet away, standing near his chair, Mr. Vye with a face like a harvest moon, would shake hands with his Chief.

Te Deum laudamus!

Disillusionment

It is said that a drowning man has a vision of what has been. Enoch beheld what might have been.

Perhaps at that moment something within him snapped under too great tension. A blinding light had shone about Saul of Tarsus. Instantly a tremendous change took place in him. But, St. Peter, when he denied Our Lord, must have been similarly translated from light into overwhelming darkness.

He heard his mother's prim voice repeating his father's words:

"Yes, Enie, we are very, very pleased."

An impulse seized him to dash his head against the wall. Instead, after a pause, he stammered out:

"B-but F-fee and I are only f-f-friends"

"Yes, yes, we quite understand, don't we, Lily?"

"Certainly we do. Your sister——"

She hesitated. Abel Saint interrupted:

"I know what is in your dear mother's mind. Judith—and it grieves me to say this—did not trust us, as you have done——"

"Abel," said Mrs. Saint entreatingly. "I told you at the time that our little Judy felt, as she admitted to me, that we knew nothing about John Wintle. Judith couldn't have known, as Enie knows, that we should be pleased——"

"Yes, yes, Lily. I say no more, but what were you about to say when I interrupted you?"

"Only this that Judith will be so pleased too. The last time she was here, she said to me: 'Fee and Enie are made for each other.'"

Enoch came within an ace of saying:

"Look here, you two, you're shovelling earth into my grave on top of me, and although I'm still alive I'm turning to dust." Instead he muttered feebly: "You go too fast. I—I believe that Fee would be very upset if she heard you. I'm a sort of elder brother to her."

Vicars' Walk

He broke off, helplessly. Out of the tense silence that followed he caught disjointed comments from his father: "Yes, yes; all is well—still children—good boy—good girl." Then he caught his mother's eye, with something like a twinkle in it. Of course she was mildly amused at these spoken thoughts; she couldn't see—how could she?—the grim humour of a most damnable situation.

He jumped up and went out of the room. As he reached the door, he turned to address his father.

"I have just about time, sir, to tell my friend what you have done for me. It may mean a sound night's rest for him."

Abel Saint nodded.

6

Like a hunted cat, Enoch sped through the gateway, under the lovely bridge that links Chapter House to Gate House, and on to Cathedral Green. Into a mind which appeared to be blank came two reflections simultaneously. The Vicars Choral of pre-Reformation days permitted neither woman, horse, nor dog to enter their precincts. No Vicar Choral could lie in his bed tormented by the thought that a lovely creature of the opposite sex lay in her bed only a few feet away. He dismissed this thought violently. Another obtruded itself. Within the memory of man the Dean had locked the door between Chapter House and Gate House. Whereupon in reprisal, the Levites in Levites Row had put up another lock on their side and bolted the door against the Dean, giving rise to a pithy saying: "The Dean locked us out; we've locked him in." Hurrying across the Green, this huge locked door seemed to be both in front of Enoch and behind him. Emerging, so to speak from the grave, he found himself still alive but a prisoner. No ordinary young

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man could have felt as he did. Upon one side of a door of solid oak clamped, studded, and hinged with iron, an impassable barrier, lay the cathedral and all it stood for: peace, beauty, Divine Service, the inexpressible expressed in stone, the cloistered seclusion, the permeating influences of the spirit, and the long slow processes of Time. Upon the other side was the world, the flesh and the Devil, with the exquisite bridge between them. From that bridge, a prisoner could see part of the cathedral and part of Fountains. He could also see, thanks to a vandal hand, a breach in the wall surrounding the Green which afforded to trippers a thirst-provoking view of an inn. The proprietor of the inn, so the gossips had it, observed most audaciously to the Dean. "Do you object, Mr. Dean, to my being able to see the Chapter House from my windows?" To this Mr. Dean riposted slyly: "No, but, if you will pardon me saying so, the Chapter House cannot be expected to derive quite the same satisfaction from seeing you." The Dean, however, denied saying this.

In the bar-parlour of this inn Enoch made sure of finding Young Alf. Old Alf saw to it that his son did not drink in his bar-parlour.

The town, as Enoch left the Green, was still awake but preparing for slumber.

7

"A cheque to-morrow? Cheers. Enie, I can't say thank you properly till you've had a drink, or two drinks. This shouts for the best—a bottle of pop."

"All right," said Enoch.

Young Alf shot a glance at him, as an unworthy thought flashed through his mind. Enoch looked harassed, almost distressed. Being the son of an old

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pincher it might be assumed that he was now regretting what he had done, so gloriously done, under great pressure.

"Check up, me lad. You won't have long to wait for your money."

"Damn the money," said Enoch savagely.

Young Alf whistled. At the picnic Enoch had damned both Bessie Custard and himself. Queer! So unlike the saintly youth to damn anybody or anything. But then Enoch Saint *was* queer, and you had to take him as you found him. Certainly within the last few weeks he had become more human.

A barmaid brought a pint of champagne.

"Put another on ice, darling," said Young Alf in his most swaggering tone.

"Not unless you mean to drink it without me," said Enoch ungraciously.

Alf stared at him.

"Come, Enie, you've done me a big turn. Let's enjoy ourselves. Women and song are not for us to-night, but we have a bottle of wine. Fill your glass, and I'll give you a toast—Bessie Custard."

Enoch gulped down the wine.

Immediately he felt better.

"That's wonderful stuff, Alf."

"The Widow, God bless her."

"It's my first glass of champagne——"

"What? You'll be telling me next that you've never kissed a girl——" Enoch remained silent, thereby provoking Alf to draw conclusions. "Ah-ha! You have. Enie, I've a notion that the girls like you. I'm not sure that you haven't the bulge on me. For why? They know me. I'm labelled. But you, ole man, you're a bag o' mystery, a blinkin' old sausage. Now I'll bet Bessie is saying to herself: 'Is Enoch Saint more breadcrumbs than pork, or wicky-wersa?'"

"Alf——"

'Disillusionment

"Sir to you?"

"How many drinks have you had to-night?"

"Not one too many, my knave of hearts. Still, as between pals, I'll own up that I dropped in here to-night to prepare for two possibilities—cash to-morrow or no cash. In either case, an extra glass made little difference. I'm still sober as the bishop."

"You oughtn't to be at your age."

"Thank you, teacher."

"It's hopeless saying anything to a man who's half drunk."

"Right! Did you want to say anything to me?"

"Yes; about Bessie."

"Full speed ahead. Mum's the word."

"I told you that I was worried about her."

"You did. And when you did I began to worry about you."

"Why?"

"You ought to be able to guess—"

"I can't guess—"

"Or won't. Now, Enie, Bessie is the cleverest girl in this town, and God knows that's not saying much. She can take care of herself. But you——? You said something about making her over——"

"I said, or meant to say, that she needed a friend, a true friend——"

"M'm! Good, well-meaning old bird you are. Best o' luck anyway. If you're out to save Bessie's immortal soul, you're taking on a parson's job, and you ain't a parson. Fill up your glass."

Enoch did so.

8

He returned to Vicars' Walk another man, or boy. Perhaps more of the former than the latter. The wine had flown to his head, but not in the common sense.

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He was able to think with some degree of coherency. He was not muzzy. But the world—his tiny world—had expanded ; he could achieve—thanks to the Widow—detachment. The Dean would have observed dryly that a too sluggish circulation of the blood had been quickened.

Was it possible to win Felicity under new and more favourable conditions ?

Alf, Willie Hiles, or any other young fellow who had gaily danced in and out of half a dozen flirtations would have replied promptly : " Yes." But an old man's son, the son too of a prim, anæmic little school-mistress, had no such hope. He knew that Felicity would have been inalienably his, had their engagement been made public on the day when they kissed each other. And then, in time, she might have been taught to love him passionately. Never, never would she have broken an engagement sanctioned and sanctified by the parents on both sides ! He dared not think of that, so bitter and savage was his resentment against what might have been. What actually *was* engrossed his attention. He still clung to an ideal which had lost its bloom ; he still believed that marriage was a sacrament between two persons divinely intended to be each the mate of the other ; but he knew from his omnivorous reading that the ordinary marriage was not made in Heaven. And he asked himself, miserably, why he, with so little to commend him to a young girl's fancy, should have dared to hope that Heaven would provide for the likes of him a perfect helpmeet ?

The Dean, knowing his young friend so well, might have asked : " Does Pride play a part in this ? "

Pride is such a chameleon. In Enoch there was Swift's pride in being scholarly, not a trace of the pride which is the natural attribute of Fortune's minions. Pride in his own good brains had made Enoch too

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modest about his outward man. He had seen little Felicity blush and bridle beneath the attentions of Alf and Willie. He could make no just allowance for a child's excitement at her first party.

On this starlit night, when he had come unwittingly to the turning point of his life, it may be set down positively that obstinacy led him astray, an obstinacy difficult to define because it was not the common obstinacy of unintelligence, but an inherited disability, like a hair-lip. His parents were set in ways which they believed to be God's ways. To them there was no debatable land between right and wrong. And the Dean, such an omnipotent influence in Enoch's life, was obstinate, sublimely so, in his attitude towards good and evil. But his obstinacy was not a disability inasmuch as he had that ripe wisdom which can discriminate.

The Dean, had Enoch sought his counsel, would have recognised instantly that something very serious indeed was clamouring for the help which only a student of advanced psychology could give. The Dean knew, none better, that calf-love, when it was authentic, rapturously the right article, might if suppressed, denied, and mortified establish an ineradicable complex. He perhaps was the only man in Fountains who, by sheer sympathy and understanding, could have dealt faithfully with such an exceptional boy as Enoch; he would have spoken out with no reserves and mawkish euphemisms, with no false sentimentalities; he would have known too that he, the famous preacher and teacher, was partly responsible for what might be termed a morbid spiritual exaltation rare in youth but less rare than is generally supposed. And Enoch would have been clay plastic to his touch.

Alas! the boy was frightened of seeking help from this wise friend, because, suddenly, he had become frightened of himself, unable to answer an insistent

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and appalling question. Had his love for Felicity been pure?

If he could have replied to that unhesitatingly: "Yes," he might have begun to woo the maid again. Virtue had gone out of him when he kissed Bessie. That had been the acid test. He tried, unhappy wretch, to determine which he had most missed: Felicity's kisses or herself. He had no doubt of her purity. Had she been thrilled as he was when they kissed, could she have spoken of it afterwards as "great fun"? If you faced the naked truth, did good masquerade as evil? Could lust put on the samite of love?

He lay awake that night, compassless in a troubled ocean of bewilderment and doubt. But, before he fell asleep, he made up his mind that he must be a true friend to Bessie.

And, for the moment, their friendship must be kept secret.

And—and—and, he must never kiss her again.

CHAPTER XLIV

England Calling

I

ENOCH did not see Bessie till they met on the following Sunday. He attempted to engross himself in his work, wondering whether there was within the Church of England an Order at all similar to the Trappists. The Dean, dealing with the nice distinctions between the secular and monastic clergy, had mentioned the Trappists, men of the world weary of the world, eager to take the vow of silence, ready, each day, to dig their graves because life apart from spiritual joys had nothing left to offer. Spiritual joys meant much to the Dean. He looked an ascetic. He sought in literary work to justify and explain the self-sacrificing lives of the men who had built the cathedral church; but he brought to his task a ripe humanity informing every page. Abhorring sin, he could speak with a twinkle in his eye about sinners. He had a soft spot in his heart for saints who had been sinners. Unfortunately, his humour playing whimsically about dead saints conveyed to a living Saint the conviction that it would play too facetiously with morbid idiosyncrasies. He could hear his revered master saying: "My boy, take more exercise. Sweat depression out of you. Walk off the blue devils."

Felicity had accused him of "glumping," brooding in a chair and thinking of what was unpleasant. He "glumped" on the Saturday before he met Bessie, because he had passed the previous evening with the Vyes. After supper Young Alf rushed in, bursting with high health and spirits. During an uproarious

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hour he had kept Felicity and her mother in shrieks of laughter. When he took leave, after being invited to call again, comments were made to which Enoch had to listen.

"I must say that Alf is a ray of sunshine," declared Mrs. Vye. "Laugh——? I haven't laughed like that since your dear father went down a coal mine in a cage with the fattest woman I ever saw; and she asked your father where she'd end up if the rope broke; and he said: 'That depends, Ma'am, on the life you've led.' We wasn't married then, but I said to meself: 'Joe Vye will be good comp'ny rain or shine.' You remember, Joe?"

"Yes," said Mr. Vye, chuckling and twiddling his thumbs, "and you laughed so that I darsn't tell you that the joke had whiskers on it."

"There, there, a young fellow that can repeat a good joke at the right time is the right sort. Did Alf make up the funny stories he told us this evening? Most certingly not. And I don't care what they say about him, he's a good son. Old Alf, so they tell me, suffers cruel from blood pressure and heart. Now I venture to say that young Alf, when he's called on to take his Dad's place, will turn over a new leaf. What he really wants is a good, steady little wife. Six months ago I was terribly afeard that he'd make a fool of himself with Bessie Custard."

"Bessie," chimed in Felicity, "is no credit to our Walk."

Enoch might have held his tongue. Instead he repeated what Alf had said:

"Bessie is clever enough to take care of herself."

Felicity bit her lip.

Enoch ought to have seen that she was displeased, but he was not looking at her, because she had maddened him with sweet beguilements bestowed on Young Alf. Enoch, being honest, would have admitted

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that Felicity had not played the smiling, provincial coquette ; far from it — No, she had behaved delightfully apart from the too loud laugh and an occasional convulsive giggle. But it was obvious that Alf had done more than merely amuse her ; And Alf confound him ! — was at his best — He appeared so fit. He drank to excess, but his eyes remained clear as his skin. Dissipation left no mark on him. Nearly all women, taking stock of Alf's outward man, would have repudiated indignantly any suggestion that he was other than a clean-living, clean-thinking young fellow of most prepossessing appearance. Felicity couldn't take her eyes off him. Accordingly, Enoch said the little word too much which led to serious misunderstandings.

"Because Bessie is clever and pretty the mothers of the plain stupid girls say beastly things about her. It's lucky for the Walk that Ambrose Custard can hardly see what is going on under his nose."

Mr Vye made cluckings. Mrs Vye, taking this indictment personally, which was absurd inasmuch as her daughter was neither plain nor stupid, said sharply :

"You never said a truer thing, Enoch Saint. If that poor old man could sit up and take notice, he'd give that pert baggage what for."

"I didn't mean that at all, Mrs. Vye — "

"Oh ! P'raps you'll tell us what you did mean ?"

"Certainly. Ambrose is the grandson of a solicitor, and he has worked for solicitors. He knows the law. The law deals very faithfully with cases of defamation of character."

Much heated, taken aback, but sensible that a boy was rebuking *her*, Mrs. Vye said acidly :

"It isn't defamation to say that Bessie Custard is a hussy."

"Pardon me, it is. And I would remind you that, in these cases, the greater the truth, the greater the

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libel. If it were true that Bessie was a bad lot, which I don't believe for a second, if you, for instance, were in a position to prove that Bessie was what some scandal-mongers have accused her of being, why even then, *even then*, if you went about repeating what you had heard, you might be charged with defamation of character, and be heavily fined."

"I—I don't believe it——"

"Nor do I," said Felicity.

"What do you say, Mr. Vye?" asked Enoch.

Noises as of distant thunder seemed to proceed from Mr. Vye as he sat upright in his chair and glared at what he conceived to be a jackanapes.

"I—I shall not say what I think." Having made this virtuous resolution, Mr. Vye proceeded to say more than he thought, carried away by his feelings as father and husband. Felicity was on the whimper; Mrs. Vye looked as if she were going down a coal mine in a cage suspended by a frayed rope that might break at any moment.

"Who are you to talk like this in my house? Defamation of character indeed! You are defaming—*us*. Mrs. Vye, always your good friend, let me tell you, has never been known to say an unkind word about anyone——"

"Never," snapped Mrs. Vye. "Not one word——"

"About anyone, man, woman or child, in or out of this Walk——"

"Or anywheres else——"

"Or anywheres else. If I say it as shouldn't, my wife and my little girl here——"

"And your other girls, Joe——"

"And my other girls are," Mr. Vye paused for a pregnant moment to consider what they were, and then continued portentously, "are Christian women, church-goers, reg'lar communicants, welfare workers, good wives and mothers, all of 'em——"

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"Not Felicity, Joe——"

"Not yet. That's what they are, young sir, and the Dean couldn't say more for himself."

"He couldn't say as much," murmured Enoch

"And now," said Mr. Vye, lying back in his chair, "you had better ask *us* to kindly excuse *you*."

This had a double meaning. "Please excuse me," in the mouth of any visitor was a genteel way of saying, "I've had about enough of this; I'm off." Probably Mr. Vye felt that Enoch's room was preferable to his company; but Enoch jumped to the conclusion that his host was exacting an apology; and championship of Bessie, bolstered by obstinacy and pride, sustained him. The Dean would have observed, "Beware the *torrens dicendi copia*!" Even as words in full spate gushed out of Mr. Vye so they poured out of Enoch.

"You ask me to apologise—and I won't. It isn't fair; it's—it's unreasonably unfair. Shall I tell you why I spoke up for Bessie? I will; I—I must. I've sat here to-night listening to Alf Kerridge. You all know what's been said about him in this town?"

Mr. Vye held up a restraining hand, imposing silence.

"Felicity——"

"Yes, Father——"

"Leave the room."

"Why?"

"Because I tell you to do so."

Felicity jumped up, burst into tears, and rushed out of the parlour. Mrs. Vye lifted two plump, quivering hands to her face. Mr. Vye said coldly:

"Go on, sir."

"I—I don't care a damn, I will. You have made Alf Kerridge welcome here to-night; you have encouraged him to call again. And you know, both of you, that what has been said about poor little Bessie

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is nothing, just idle gossip, compared to what has been said about Alf. But Alf is the son of a prosperous publican ; and Bessie is the granddaughter of a poor scrivener. Alf is the sort of sinner over whom the angel mothers and daughters, *and daughters*, of this town rejoice, even before he repents. But Bessie, with hardly a friend in the world, is stoned."

A wail arose from Mrs. Vye. Mr. Vye looked up as if he were entreating guidance from above.

Enoch fled.

2

He fled into himself. Where else could he go ? Crossing a plot of lawn encircled by forget-me-nots, he hurried through the gate and paused outside it. His heart was thumping against his ribs, his hands were trembling. To reach his bedroom, he would have to pass through the parlour where his parents were now sitting.

The Walk was deserted, although lights still glimmered in many windows.

Enoch hesitated, glanced about him, and began to walk up the incline. By night or day the chapel was open to all who lived in Vicars' Walk. Very lately electric light had been installed. Hard by the door was a notice asking visitors to be careful not to disturb others at their devotions. Many of the older persons in the Walk would enter the chapel, kneel down, and pray for a few minutes in a most wonderful and prayer-inspiring silence.

Enoch sat down, having turned on one light. He was alone in this sanctuary which had been a sanctuary for five hundred years. Even as he passed the threshold he was conscious of a benediction ; and he noticed how pure the air was.

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He could not have told you whether or not he prayed for help, although help came. As he calmed down, he knew that he had been far too outspoken, and that his championship of Bessie might prove to her a disservice. That distressed him. He had also affronted three good friends, who might refuse to accept a qualified apology. No other apology was possible. He could say honestly enough: "In the heat of the moment, I spoke intemperately, forgive me." He could not say: "I withdraw what I said; I didn't mean it." He had meant every word of it. What he had said was the truth; but he might have expressed it with more consideration for the feelings of friends and neighbours incapable of getting outside their own vicious circle of moth-eaten conventions and shibboleths. . . .

Sitting there, perfectly still, curiously aware that he was far away from his own petty world, he realised the essential difference between himself and all, yes, all these Levites. If Mrs. Vye repeated to Mrs. Saint what had passed, if she were able to report the talk *verbatim*, his mother would sigh and express regret. *She would not understand.* Even Arthur Kerridge, feeling as he did about Bessie, would side with the moon-faced Vye. Heavens! What a dyed-in-the-wool Levite was Joseph Vye! The letter of the law to him was everything, the spirit—nothing. Was his own father tarred with the same brush? Yes; he, too, had become the slave of his environment, confounding what the Dean called "values." Service and lip-service in the temple ranked first.

He recalled a story of the Dean's told to children in the Lady Chapel, which lies to the east of the cathedral church. Of the different parts of the great fane, Enoch loved most the Lady Chapel not so much on account of its architectural beauty, but because of the children's services, so simple, so charming when the Dean took

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them. Even the children knew that this was a super-duty on the part of Mr. Dean, a labour of love with love obliterating labour.

This was the story.

A child was too ill to attend church. The Dean suggested somehow that the child, a small girl, was very ill, not likely to recover. Almost as soon as the other children in the family had taken leave of her, she fell asleep. At this point in the narrative the Dean paused dramatically. Half of his small audience felt that the child might be dead ; the other half, with less imagination, took for granted that she was asleep. Before falling asleep the child had wished that she could accompany the others. In her sleep an angel came to her, stood at the foot of the bed, and said : " Your wish is granted. I have been sent to take you to church. Don't be afraid ! You will be quite safe in my arms ; and I promise you that you will see and hear everything." The child had no fear whatever, as the angel bent down and picked her up. In a second she was transported to the church, where she saw plainly the faces so familiar to her. Throughout the church was a bewildering buzzing ; and yet, so far as the child could see, the congregation was praying in silence, which indeed they had been asked to do. The angel explaining the buzzing ; " You hear the prayers which are not prayers. Because they are not prayers, they can't ascend to God. Really they are thoughts, and thoughts have forms. I am going to touch your eyes and then you will see these forms." He touched the child's eyes and immediately she saw hundreds of bewildering objects, a dancing jumble of *things*. It seemed to her that half the shops in the town where she lived had emptied their goods into the church and that these goods were alive. Hoops whirled ; tops spun, dolls of every conceivable size and shape jiggled up and down. But, far more astonishing, the

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child saw joints of meat, loaves of bread, coins of the realm, hats, bonnets, skirts, petticoats, stockings and boots bobbing about in maddest disorder. Again the angel passed a hand across the child's eyes, and she saw nothing. "You have seen," said the angel, "the thought forms of those who seem to be praying, but really their minds are busy with the things of this earth, and the things of this earth belong to this earth and cannot leave it. Now I'm going to touch your ears. Listen!" The angel touched her ears, as the child closed her eyes. Instantly she heard a strain of music, a symphony of notes entrancingly beautiful, perfectly harmonised, forming—so it seemed to the child—a rivulet of sound. Again the angel touched her ears and the child listened to the angel's voice: "You heard a chaplet of prayer ascending to God. It was only a small chaplet, because out of all those on their knees in front of you, only a few are praying truly."

This story came back to Enoch because he was incapable of true prayer. He wished to pray, but he felt unfit to pray. He could think at the moment of nothing but Felicity's kisses which sooner or later—so some horrible premonition assured him—would be bestowed on Young Alf.

3

The next day, Saturday, passed miserably; a letter from his sister, which Enoch passed on to his parents, provoked argument at breakfast. Judith, repeating what her husband had said to her, wrote that war was imminent. John, it seemed, had talked with a customer, a Cabinet Minister, who shared the convictions of General Sir Alastair Ogilvie-Black and Dr. Dyson. Judith admitted that she was frustrated, because John had declared his intention of joining-up.

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Every able-bodied young man would be expected by England to do his duty.

Enoch mentioned this letter to the Dean, who made a significant gesture. Nevertheless, for reasons of his own, he declined to discuss a question put to him by his young friend. If war came, if John Wintle joined up, what ought Enoch Saint to do?

Enoch Saint decided that it was his manifest destiny to stop a bullet. Probably that was the best thing that could happen to him.

All in all, the blackest Saturday of his life.

4

When he met Bessie there was an air of constraint on both sides. She was awaiting him, and he guessed that she might have approached the glade by another route. She looked cool, pale, and prettier than ever as they shook hands and sat down side by side; but he marked a troubled expression in her umber eyes. She may have read distress upon his sensitive face. Still his smile was reassuring.

"You are glad to see me?" she asked.

"Why, Bessie, of course I am."

"You don't think I'm a bad girl?"

"I'm sure you aren't."

"But I might be. And if—if I were, I should have to pretend to a nice boy like you that I was good as gold, wouldn't I?"

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because I know something, because I think you're wonderful, much too good to be my friend, and because, lastly, I'm going to tell you what a little beast I am."

She took his arm and pressed it gently.

"I'll begin at the beginning."

England Calling

But her first words were tentative.

"Do you think, Enie, that girls ought to be better than boys?"

Enoch, taken by surprise, replied that he hadn't considered the question. Perhaps on the whole yes. For instance, one expected more from one's mother than one's father.

"But if you haven't either?"

Enoch said that men liked to think that their own women-kind were good, which provoked an ironical smile from Bessie.

"That's vanity."

"May be it is."

"Anyway, I'm not good just because I live in the Walk. I don't see any harm in theatre-going, dancing, and pillion-riding; I don't believe in going to church because it's the respectable thing to do; I hate make-believe."

Enoch wondered why she spoke so vehemently. Her small hand still rested upon his arm and she emphasised every paragraph with a squeeze. Suddenly, she withdrew her hands, clasped her fingers round her knees and spoke in a different tone.

"At the picnic, Enie, I saw you, for the first time, as different from other boys, but, deep down in my heart, I didn't believe that you were. So I said to myself, 'I'll find out.' When I put a strawberry between my lips and asked you to share it, I was ever so glad that you didn't. Do you understand what I mean? Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Not very clearly yet," said Enoch.

"You will in a moment. Perhaps women always want what is difficult to get. And men——"

"Yes?"

"Perhaps I ought to say boys. And I hate to mention names, but I must. I think that boys like Alf Kerridge and Willie Hiles want what they think is

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easy to get, and they are only thinking of themselves not of the girl who, if she isn't an idiot, soon finds out that they are rotters "

" You think those two are rotters ? You do. Then why have you played about with them ? "

" For fun, and for another reason which you will think rather beastly. Because I was a jolly, pleasure-loving little girl before I was sixteen, the old cats of our Walk began to call me names. They enjoyed thinking the worst of me. And I—I didn't care what they thought, or what they said. When I did begin to care it was a bit late to mend my manners, unless I was ready to eat humble pie. So I just went on shocking them. Enie, I'm going to talk to you as I might to my mother. I'm going to tell you things which I might tell to a girl friend, if I had one. Why ? Because I trust you. And, if we're to be friends, I want you to know me as I am. I asked you why you were friends with Alf, and you replied why are you ? Tell me why you are friends with him. I have a reason in asking."

" He stood up for me, Bessie, when I couldn't stand up for myself. I suppose I admire in him what is missing in me, his devil-may-care joy in life, and all that. He makes me laugh, the rascal. And—and, to be perfectly honest, I suppose I was flattered when he made a friend of me."

" Yes ; and that's why I went about with him. He made me laugh, but I didn't laugh when he asked me to marry him."

" Alf Kerridge asked you to marry him ? "

" Enie, you say that as if it were incredible. Yes ; he did ; and you can guess why. And because I guessed I refused him. So he dropped me like a hot potato. I can read your thought. You are wondering if Willie paid me the same honour. He didn't. Willie can't support a wife, but he hopes to find a wife who will support him."

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"Have you dropped Willie?"

"Yes."

"And there's nobody else?"

"Only you," she whispered

5

This was very flattering. Enoch experienced a warm glow permeating all tissues of mind and body. It was now his turn to lay an appreciative hand on Bessie's arm, and to press it gently. They didn't look at each other; they sat together blissfully conscious that it was indeed a heavenly day, a perfect evening. A breeze from Severn's sea cooled Enoch's cheeks but not his thoughts. He had the feeling that some fairy godmother was hovering overhead pronouncing a benediction, whispering: "My dear children, be happy. Put worries from you."

Presently he asked:

"Is your name Elizabeth?"

She laughed.

"Of course it is. What a funny boy you are!"

"I didn't know. Elizabeth is a fine name. It means goddess of the oath. Enoch means consecrated."

Their eyes met.

"I don't like your name, Enie."

"Nor do I; but it's a family name. The Dean is great on names. Of course you know that surnames are more or less modern?"

"Modern?"

"A few hundred years old—that's all. I suppose somebody one day addressed a baker as Mr Baker, and after that instead of being merely John the baker, he became John Baker."

"I see. You mean that there was a saint, Enoch the saint; but he became Enoch Saint."

Vicars' Walk

"Something like that, but one wonders if in those days names mattered."

"What do you mean?"

"Did one have to live up to one's name? Take the name of Knight. Did a Knight try to be knightly?"

"Perhaps he did."

"And then Shakespeare wrote 'What's in a name?' as if he, for one, thought that names didn't matter."

"I wonder how we got the name of Custard."

"The Dean says that Custard is a natural corruption of *croustade*, which means a pie or a tart."

"Enie—!"

"What is it?"

"How perfectly awful! A tart— That is what some of the old cats think I am."

To his dismay she seemed terribly upset. Before he could think of something solacing, she burst out:

"Did you guess why I called you wonderful just now? I'm sure you didn't. This morning I heard what you said on Friday night to those Vyes. Mrs. Vye can't keep anything to herself. She told old Mrs. Sumshion; Mrs. Sumshion told Mrs. Hiles; Mrs. Hiles told Willie——"

"Told Willie?"

"Who told me. He jeered at me. We had a row. Willie wouldn't stick up for me, or anybody else. He was beastly; I hate him; and I told him so. If I had my way I'd never speak to him again. Yes; I know what you said to old Moonface, and I wonder he didn't drop dead. You told him that the angel mothers of our Walk rejoiced over Alf Kerridge and stoned me——"

She burst into tears.

Where were the good resolutions of Enoch Saint? Where was the fairy godmother?

He put his arms round her neck. She lifted her face to his and kissed him and went on kissing him, saying between her sobs: "You are sweet—a darling boy—"

England Calling

and I used to be hateful to you- and now, to day, I'd die for you."

"Bessie—Bessie!"

"Call me Elizabeth. If I'm godde of the oath, I'll make an oath. I—I swear that I'll do something, big for you, Enie, some day. If—if I live to be an old woman I'll never forget that you were the first to stick up for me, when I hadn't one true friend in Fountains."

He returned her kisses, so moved and excited that speech failed him. . . .

6

They went back to the Walk that night, apart as before, but linked together in body, mind and spirit. They had discussed nothing, made no plans. The passing hour, passing so swiftly, had sufficed.

7

It is impossible to make even a guess at what might have happened if conditions had been other than what they were. Upon Monday morning the world woke up with a start to full realization of the impending horror of a war certain to change the map of Europe and to affect millions of human beings. The Dean made that plain to Fountains. Fountains, so to speak, was so aloof from the world of action that the good townspeople refused at first to believe that any war could affect them. Most of them hoped that England would stay out, till it dawned upon them that England would be eternally damned if she did.

This was the fateful octave preceding the week in which Germany declared war on England, a week of wild conjectures, of furious bickerings, of everlasting

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jabberings. The Dean commandeered Enoch's services as secretary from ten till six. Accordingly, the young man was made aware of the appalling situation; he had barely time to think of anything else. During that week he and Bessie met twice. The library in the Gate House was closed; so they met in the nook on the hill, clutching at each other, clinging to each other, miserably sensible that they were on the edge of a volcano about to burst into eruption. Nevertheless they plighted troth after a fashion. Whatever happened they would be true to each other. All talk of the future seemed futile when there might be no future. The themes so dear to lovers, the building of tiny castles in Spain, the adjustments of ways and means, the hopes, fears, joys, and mutual confidences were denied to them, swamped in the uncertainty of what the morrow might bring forth. Enoch, echoing the Dean, made it only too plain that an earthquake which might shatter the very foundations of civilization had begun.

"You'll be wanted, Bessie."

"Me, Enie? Whatever for?"

"The Dean says that the women will have to step into the shoes of the men; he is rubbing it into me, and everybody with whom he comes in contact that this horror is personal, that it will affect even the babies."

"You won't have to go?"

"I shall go."

"But I read to-day that we are to carry on as usual——"

"If you could hear the Dean on that—! *As usual*. What poisonous tosh! *As usual*—! A parrot cry."

"It can't last long."

"Another childish assertion. It comes to this—nobody knows anything; nobody can guess at what may happen."

"Oh, Enie, kiss me while you can."

England Calling

8

Long afterwards, Enoch was able to analyse feelings which at the moment were in flux. Bessie and he had been whirled together; and the conviction that they might be whirled asunder in the twinkling of an eye exercised upon both an overwhelming centripetal force. Felicity had ceased to be. If Enoch thought of her, she appeared to be immeasurably distant, the white maiden of youthful dreams. Bessie was a palpitating, flesh and blood reality, proffering the impassioned assurance denied by Felicity--telling her lover between ardent kisses that he was everything to her. She owned up that she plotted and planned to capture him on the day of the Brenda picnic.

The Walk, of course, was incapable of seeing either Enoch or Bessie in true perspective. The Dean had said of the Collegians that their acute sense of isometrical projection made them a corporate body. At one time, the singing men had to subscribe to a solemn oath on admittance to the Walk. In case of forgetfulness, it was further laid down by the Founder that a Table of Statutes and Injunctions should be read once a year to his beneficiaries. In this remarkable table the Vicars Choral are enjoined to abstain from oaths, to pray for the founder, that none shall carry a weapon, that the secrets of the college be kept close, that slanderers and stirrers up of strife should be expelled from the precincts--and so on, and so forth--

Perhaps in the year 1914, some of these statutes were more honoured in the breach, but the Dean knew that those who dwelt in the Walk observed outwardly the founder's injunctions. They did see eye to eye upon matters of propriety, expediency, and general deportment. They believed that they set an example to others; they judged others by their own lights;

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they "projected," to use the Dean's word, themselves as being alike and thinking alike.

Whether or not Enoch Saint, thanks to a better education, thanks also to companionship with the Sage of the Close, could see himself in true perspective is most difficult to determine. Enoch, so he had been told when he sang in the choir, meant "consecrated." The boy had accepted this as something outside his volition. He and his father were in and of the temple.

But Bessie had been a rebel against authority from the moment when authority attempted to deal with her. She might have been malleable to the hand of her grandfather, if that hand had not been palsied by writers' cramp. One may conceive the old scrivener as blinking at a tiny sheet of pink note-paper when he, all his life, had written on parchment. He had been kind to the child; he was incapable of understanding her, or of directing her energies; in fine he took her as he found her and made the best of her.

9

Enoch, as soon as he realised what he was to Bessie, wished to make public their engagement. But Bessie, like Felicity, although driven by different motives, entreated him to do nothing so strife-provoking. Felicity, when she imposed secrecy, was thinking of herself and her freedom; Bessie had no thought for herself; she knew from experience that Enoch, the consecrated, the pattern of what a son of the Walk should be, would become the target of a thousand barbed shafts. He would lose caste.

Had it not been for the outbreak of the war, Enoch would have had his way. The big thing was so tremendously big that it dwarfed all private and intimate affairs.

England Calling

During the fortnight that succeeded the declaration of war, the lovers met for a few blissful minutes when and where they could, thankfully aware that none paid attention to them. The young men of Mountains were busy discussing their excellent reasons for not joining up. Oddly enough, although the humour of it made no appeal to the Walk, the Bristol cattle-boats were bringing over from Ireland hundreds of single men to help in the harvest. And these fellows, many of whom regarded England as the arch-enemy, were the first to announce their intention of fighting because they loved a fight. The Wessex boys who, in peace time, hung about the street corners, met these valiant Celts and were noticeably depressed rather than impressed.

Meanwhile the Dean knew.

The Dean, stalking up and down his library, deplored the apathy of the young men; and he predicted that nothing short of a serious reverse to our army of Contemptibles would awaken Mountains. Probably he spoke as frankly to a nephew who was reading for the Bar. That young gentleman had a word with Enoch.

"I'm going to join up here, Saint. Not a word to a soul! I want to be the first. I shall take the shilling and trust to luck."

"To luck, Mr. Dyson?"

"I mean my chance of a commission. First come, first served. I think it will please my dear old uncle; but I don't know. He must have jawed to you as he has to me about the wethers of his flock. They are huddled together. I might stampede them in the right direction. Anyway, I shall have a shot at it."

Enoch said quietly:

"When?"

"As soon as a recruiting sergeant comes to Sleepy

Vicars' Walk

Hollow. He may come at any moment. If he got the tip, he might come to-morrow."

"I want to join up with you," said Enoch.

"You—you mean that?"

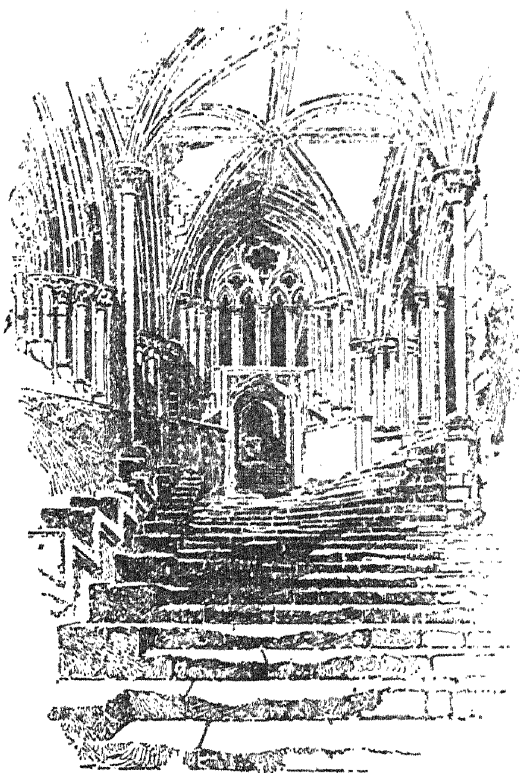
"I do."

"Splendid! We may practise the goose-step together."

"Yes," said Enoch.

Book Two

Cato used to assert that wise men profited more by fools than fools by wise men ; for that wise men avoided the faults of fools, but that fools would not imitate the good examples of wise men.



Stairway to Chapter House and Gate House.

CHAPTER EIGHT
A Vanishing Lady

I

WHEN Enoch Saint joined up, he became an almost invisible cog on a colossal fly-wheel. So much has been written about the war from every point of view that no attempt will be made here to add to the congested mass of details. Long before Enoch returned to civil life, he was aware of a most enormous change in himself, but he could not say either then or thereafter how it came about. Meanwhile certain incidents must be set down, and one question must be asked and answered.

Why had he joined up so swiftly?

Nearly all his friends in Fountains, including his parents, thought that they could answer this. He had set a much needed example to other less intrepid youths. For three days he was the talk of the town. The Dean struck the right note when he said to his verger. "We can congratulate each other, old friend. Your son and my nephew have shown the way, and, alas, it is the only way." Abel Saint repeated these words, which passed from mouth to mouth. Fond mothers observed that only sons ought to be the last to go. Vicars' Walk acclaimed Enoch as a *Man*.

But what did the boy say to the girl who loved him?

He had reason to know that she did love him with a passion which had swept both of them far, very far, from the Walk and the Precincts. But he dared not tell her that he was frightened; he could not bring himself to say: "Bess, our souls' salvation is at stake."

Vicar's Walk

He had the feeling that if he tried to put what was best in him into words, she would laugh and think him a fool. He was a boy, that he accepted as true the extraordinary legend of Fountains. Knoch Saint had done his duty. As a rule he said little, thankful that he could do what he had done for granted. His pride in him was intoxicating. It is possible that he, who offered the wife of an officer — "Fountains, after a period of absence, away," was now murmuring: "Don't say Mr. Atkin."

Don't say Mr. Atkin? Fountains was shocked at the thought of the Dean's reply in the ranks, but it was probable that young Mr. Dyson would be Captain Dyson before they marched to Berlin; and on that march Knoch Saint, why not? might also be in command of his company.

Meanwhile the All Highest was marching on Paris.

2

Knoch, when he joined up, supposed that he would find himself in a West-*sex* regiment, at a dépôt not too far from Fountains. He was despatched to a big West Country town. Thence he was whirled to the Isle of Wight and attached to a regiment short of men. Here intensive training began, here for the first time in his life, he became physically fit. His medical examination had been perfunctory. But he came within an ace of breaking down before he put on khaki. Fortunately for him, both the doctor and his own sergeant treated him with consideration. An extract from a letter to Be-*sic* explains this:

"I'm in cotton wool" (he wrote), "because I can play the piano and sing a song. Funny, isn't it? I'm wanted in the canteen. Any fellow who can do anything to amuse or entertain the others has a fairly easy time. One chap is a tip-top cook. They say he won't go to

A Vanishing Lady

France at all. Same applies to another chap, a famous footballer. Another man joined up and never mentioned that he was an instructor in Swedish exercises; his Company Commander found it out. Now, he's doing his own job, and likely to keep on doing it till the end of the war. . . ."

What the poor boy dreaded came to pass before he went to the Isle of Wight. He was given two days' leave; and he knew, just as Bessie knew, that out of this only about two hours could be spent with her. The Walk accorded him an enthusiastic reception; every girl in the town smiled at him.

He met Bessie in their old nook after nightfall. Each, of course, was conscious that this might be their last meeting but one on earth. It was now plain that an appalling toll of life was being levied upon our "Contemptibles". We still believed that the pouring of fresh troops into the field, the co-operation of Italy and the collapse of Austria would end the war within a year, but, of the first hundred thousand to face and withstand the enemy, how many would survive?

Afterwards, Enoch could recall no word or act of his which could be stigmatised as seduction, no cajolery, no beguilements. Bessie and he came together inevitably, two leaves upon a rushing torrent——

Next night, they met again in Ambrose Custard's house. Woman's wit suggested this. Vicars' Walk was ill-lit. Old Ambrose went early to bed. The Custard garden was encircled by a thick yew hedge. Any man, watching his opportunity, could pass through the hand-gate and be lost to sight. Enoch, dismayed at first, had to admit that the risk of discovery was negligible on a dark night. He could leave his father's house after supper on the understanding that he would not return till the old people had gone to bed.

This simple plan worked admirably.

Enoch wondered whether Bessie would feel, show or

Vicars' Walk

express regret. He was prepared to do anything—a secret marriage, for instance. But, as on the previous night, she refused to discuss the future. The present was theirs, nothing else mattered. When he suggested marriage, she laughed.

“How, when, where?” Before he could answer her, he heard her voice in his ear: “You are off to-morrow; we must not waste a precious second. Are you blaming your old friend? I’m the one who is to blame. I believe I wanted you more than you wanted me. Before you came I said to myself: ‘I shall give myself to him—a sort of present for a dear brave boy—’”

She laughed joyously, as she pressed her lips to his.

3

Pluck sustained her to the end. When he bade her farewell, he feared tears. She pinched his cheek as she whispered: “Plenty of time to cry after you’ve gone.” Then he crept to the door, opened it, and peered out into the soft kindly darkness. No moon, no stars, a drizzle of rain.

In the garden they kissed for the last time.

As he passed through the wicket gate Enoch glanced up and down the Walk before returning to his father’s house. The little street seemed to be deserted; but, descending the incline, he thought that he heard a step behind him. He turned. Seeing nothing, it occurred to him that he had heard an echo. And then, once more, as he reached his father’s gate, there was a sound as if another man was about. Turning again, with eyes more attuned to the darkness, he detected a sort of blur upon the opposite side.

If it was all so imminent to be dismissed as negligible.

In the narrow bed where he had passed so many hours of suffering as a boy, he lay awake and compared

A Vanishing Lady

Enoch, the Consecrated, with Bessie's Enie. A moral Atlantic tossed between the two. It was difficult to realise that the ardent lover of Bessie had been the shy, reverential sweetheart of Felicity. Bessie had told him that Young Alf, who had not joined up, was a constant visitor at the Vyes and regarded by the Walk as a reformed character. Enoch, not too confident of Alf's reformation, suffered no pangs of jealousy. If Felicity married Alf she might work a miracle. Alf, at any rate, would secure a sweet little wife.

"At the Brenda picnic," said Bessie, "you couldn't take your eyes off her."

"You are mistaken——"

"Eh?"

"That is exactly what I did."

Clever Bessie asked no more questions.

Lying awake, Enoch decided that he would marry her before he left England. If it couldn't be done secretly it must be done openly with or without the approval of the Walk. This excellent resolution was fortified by something which Bessie had said with such sincerity that Enoch was profoundly moved. When she had spoken of herself as a present for a brave boy, he had blurted out a word or two of shy protest. "If—if I did not come back, and if you were alone with the consequences." She put her hand against his mouth. "Stop! if you were taken from me, Enie, I should have something that was yours to comfort me. But you're not going to be taken I know it." Woman's intuition served her well, but how many women used the same words during the four years that followed?

Having a strong will (and a conscience) it is likely that a marriage might have taken place. But, next morning, before he went on duty, Abel Saint had a talk alone with his son.

Vicars' Walk

4

Enoch was prepared for his father's opening sentences. He knew that the old man's grip on life was weakening day by day. But the grip was there, the will to live and to do his work till the end.

"I may not see you again, my son."

"I shall get last leave before we go to France."

"That's as may be. This war, my boy, has taken from me my savings. There will be enough to provide for your mother; hardly anything for you."

"I—I can support myself."

"That is a comfort. I must tell you something which I have kept from your mother—and everybody else in this town. My commonsense told me to invest my money in what is called gilt-edged securities. I began by doing that. And then, unhappily for me, I was tempted to—to gamble. . . ."

"To gamble?"

"Yes, the Devil must have chuckled because the temptation came to me in our Chapter House. I was showing it to a South African millionaire at the time of the great boom in Kaffirs."

"Kaffirs?"

Abel Samit, looking apostolic, had to explain to his son what he meant by "Kaffirs." Enoch, wanting to spare him, said quickly:

"I understand. You were given a tip—and you lost."

"No; I won. I was astonishingly lucky. The Devil saw to that."

"Why shouldn't you gamble?" Enoch asked defiantly. As he spoke he took the old man's hand and pressed it. Abel smiled faintly, returning the pressure.

"You know why; just as I do. We are, as the Dean says, Levites, we cannot do what others do. Had the Dean known of my dealings, he would have asked

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me to resign. I gambled secretly. It was the only excitement in my life."

"I—I understand, Father. Don't say any more."

"I must; it's my duty. I was successful, partly because I have a good headpiece and partly because I took the advice of an able broker. Five years ago, Enoch, I was worth about seven thousand pounds."

"Seven thousand pounds?"

"At least. And then—"

"Yes?"

"Against my better judgment I invested my capital geographically."

"Geographically?"

"Yes; my broker refused to believe in the possibility of war. He persuaded me that Germany was going ahead industrially. I put nearly all I had, Enoch, into German, Russian, and Roumanian securities. The money is still there. But will it be there at the end of this war? Now listen. I bought for your mother an annuity. She cannot survive me long. You will inherit a few hundreds and my foreign certificates which to-day are waste-paper. One more word. Some three months ago I thought that you and little Felicity Vye might make a match of it. But you seemed quite indifferent. Now, you will be in no position to marry if you are spared. You can't earn or save money till the war is over. If you come back here, the Dean will see to it that you are offered Joseph Vye's position when he steps into my shoes. But this is between us two. You will live in this house and look after your mother. I shall go the more quietly, if I have some assurance from you, my son, that you wish, as I hope and believe you do, to take my place here."

"I—I love Fountains," said Enoch.

"I know you do. And before you joined up, both your mother and I thought that a quiet life here would suffice you. Now I am not so sure."

Vicars' Walk

5

This task impressed Enoch cumulatively. He never forgot it. Again and again during the months that followed he could summon up, as if from the vasty deep, vivid presentment of his father's fine head with the tired eyes looking out of the yellow face and the tired voice issuing from the apostolic beard. Henceforward he saw his father as a human being, subject to the weaknesses of the flesh.

A gambler.

It seemed incredible. Nevertheless the Dean might reckon that to be an infirmity of a noble mind not comparable with the lusts of the flesh. Young as he was, Enoch began to wonder whether the tag of robbing Peter to pay Paul could be applied to such men as Dr Dymon, Arthur Kerridge, and his own father. They had subordinated the flesh, mortified it, perhaps, trampled it under foot, and then—who could tell?—the too strict discipline might have reacted upon the mind. Still, all this was wild conjecture. What stood out was the admission that the senior verger had craved excitement, that his family life had not sufficed him.

At that moment he felt closer to his father in spirit than he had ever felt before, and Abel Saint's confession had imparted iridescence to a too drab personality. The impulse seized Enoch to speak of his own life. But how could it be done? He saw himself tumbling over the mental, unable to find the right words. He saw his father's face, grievously shocked. Silence, in time, rather than being determined, was predetermined by the rigid ethical code of the Walk.

In the Isle of Wight the boy had no time to think. He fell asleep as soon as his head touched his pillow, he became a valiant trencher-man, he enjoyed the quietude of the camp. Bessie and he exchanged letters once a week. Enoch, a trained penman,

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set down, whimsically enough, the events of each day. Bessie's letters were love letters—joyous at first, a frank outpouring of her feelings, but less joyous as it became more certain that no leave would be accorded her lover till the eve of his departure for France. I need read and re-read these letters with increasing bewilderment. Was his temperament that of a creature of moods and tenses, blowing now hot now cold? Unable to go to her, he would have suggested that she should come to him, had she been free to do so. She was working hard in the shop and out of it in attendance upon her grandfather. He knew that her life must be devastatingly dull. About the middle of October he learned that old Ambrose was confined to his bed with a severe chill. In her next letter she said that she had left the shop. A week later Ambrose Custard died.

What followed drove Fnoch mad with impotence, fear, suspense, and humiliation. Bessie wrote a letter which, quite obviously, was blotted with tears and, as obviously, the result of some overwhelming, cataclysmic emotion.

"My own Fnie—I am so unhappy, so miserable, and I wish that I were dead. Before poor granfer died, he told me something about my mother. Not much. I was right, Lnie. Father never married her, and she died when I was a baby. Granfer has left me a little money. He had it in the house, all in gold. It is far more than I expected. Please remember that it's enough to last me for two or even three years. And now, oh, dear, how can I go on? I must go away *at once*. I shall go as soon as I can after the funeral is over. Lnie, I can't tell you where I am going or why I am going. Believe this that I shall be safe. I can look after myself. I will write again when I'm less miserable, when I'm away from here. I love you more than ever, far more than you love me.

Uncle's Walk

I am doing what I believe to be best. I shall think of you always as the dearest and sweetest boy that ever lived. Yours and broken HEZARITH.

6

He wrote Bessie a letter to him.

For a fortnight he hoped to hear from her. During that time a letter from his mother confirmed the main fact of the matter. The Walk and Fountains. Some friends of his mother's, a solicitor, had instructions to sell her old man's sticks of furniture, but he was ignorant of his home address. Mysteriously she had written to Mrs. Saint, incapable of repeating gossip about other matrons in the Walk were warned that it never.

He wrote his mother to find out more was futile. He wrote a guarded letter to Arthur Kerridge with the barest mention of Bessie. Was it true that she had left Fountains? The organist replied dourly

You ask for information about Bessie Custard. I know nothing and I have no stomach for what is mere hearsay. As your friend I can thank God that you had nothing to do with the girl. The women in our Walk believe the worst. Because I held her to be light, I wish to be fair and just. She went off alone. It is recorded that she resented what has been said about her. It is more than likely that she wanted to go."

He was sandwiched into a long, leisurely letter with a paper of a distracted young man. He suffered so alarmingly that he neglected his duty and incurred a sharp reprimand from his Company Commander.

"What wrong with you, Saint?"

"Nothing."

You are doing nothing into a don't-care-a-damn New York letter from me with or without flowers. You

A Vanishing Lady

have brains but have you guts? We want guts for our job. Pull your old to other man and

He hesitated staring hard at Finch. His face

"You were going to add something?"

"I was. Tomorrow morning on parade I'll see a grin not a scowl. A reward for you. It's worth a corporal's stripe to you."

A very hard nut this tall youthful captain, but one who under took his men.

Enoch pulled himself together in time. At any rate he did not hurl his spite. Later on a famous singer warbled one of the new verses. He noted it may be presumed to lighten all those who were leaving their girls behind them. Mr. Atkins was informed that the girls would be true. After the song Enoch listened to disconcerting criticism from half a dozen old soldiers who lent a disdainful ear to sentimental ditties.

"True be blowed," said one veteran. "The pretty pets aren't true. No use kiddin' ourselves about that. Off with the old love and on with the new. That's the pass-word. And how many of us are true to them, hey? I says, and I've cuddled dozens that a gal remains true to a Tommy so long as she's on his knee."

There was more of this blistering stuff from the men of experience. The boys resented it, Finch held his tongue. He was living and learning in a rough and tough environment.

Ignorant of physiological facts which ought to be taught in the National Schools, he had nerved himself to face possibilities. In the more remote rural districts outside Fountains young men who got girls into trouble married them. Enoch made sure that Bessie would have told him if such trouble had come to her. There was no reason whatever why she shouldn't. He had offered to marry her. The more his harassed mind dwelt upon this lamentable situation, the more muddled

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prevail. But he brought himself to believe that there was still another man. The canteen was full of men, telling it with stories of the bottom of the world. There was always another man. And that was it, but there was always another man to replace the faithful man.

7

After Christmas, early in 1915, he was accorded last leave before returning for France. He found his father in good health. His sister Judith travelled from London to bid 'God-speed' to him. John Warrick joined up. It occurred to Lnoch that Judith would have kindly feelings towards Bessie, but he could not tell her the truth. He had made up his mind to question both Willie Hiles and Young Alf, but they too had joined up.

Judith remembered Bessie was ready to talk about her and like her mother -incapable of repeating slander. What she said had a gloss of truth.

Bessie Custard. 'Did you know that old Ambrose left her money, a pile of hidden gold?'

Who told you that, Judy? "

Father.

Father? "

He knows more than we think. Father got it, I fancy, from the lawyer who sold the furniture. He has money belonging to Bessie - but he doesn't know where she is. Father being Father would be sure to ask if Bessie had enough money to keep her, and then I dare say the lawyer may have said something about the matter. My own idea from what I remember of Bessie, who is five years younger than me, is that she wanted to go to the World. You and I, I me, know jolly well that if we came into a nice little pile of gold our

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neighbours would make our lives perfectly hateful. So she skipped out.

"Very strange to me," mumbled Lnoch.

"You are a man. You can't imagine what aish in hand means to a girl who has never had it. And you see, so far as I can find out, there was nothing to keep Bessie here. I don't filthy-gossip, but I know just as you do, that she played fast and loose with several young men. That caused a lot of talk. And there's something else. Mrs. Vye tells me that Bessie's mother was a lady. The child, when she came here, had the clothes of a lady's child. Mrs. Vye saw them. Bessie may have gone to her mother's people. Mrs. Vye told me yesterday that Bessie didn't know a thing about her mother. But what more likely, I ask you, than that old Ambrose should have told her something before he died. He was conscious to the last. Now my guess is that Bessie saw a chance of starting fresh as a young lady, and for all we know to the contrary, she may have written to her mother's people, and they may have insisted that she should cut loose from all of us."

"It's possible," assented Lnoch.

He had four days' leave, no time to make exhaustive enquiries. Already Bessie seemed to be forgotten. Meanwhile it was pleasant to be fussed over by Judy. Upon his previous visit Mrs. Vye had embraced him. He understood then that he was received back into high favour, but he had seen little of Felicity. Now, the imps of comedy were getting ready to make a further fool of him.

Felicity beamed upon him.

The glamour encompassing a first love affair is an enchantment, a spell, a fairy's web of spun silk threads, mere gossamer. But it may endure. When Felicity

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beamed upon Enoch, he knew that the spell of first love still lingered upon her. He had come back to the Walk so changed and wildly that even the Dean had raised eyebrows at sight of him. Of the immense inward change nobody was conscious save himself.

He knew that if he lifted a beckoning finger Felicity would flit into his arms. And this seemed to be the last straw imposed by the Furies. Had he been alone with her he might have beamed back. The new Enoch, alive to his finger tips so vigorous that he could endure without fatigue the longest route march, seemed to take command of the lanky, sallow-faced, shy, awkward dreamer and bookworm. The new Enoch thundered in his ear. "Take her, you fool. You may be dead in a month's time. She is yours for the taking."

Mrs. Vye and Judith imposed temporary restraint. He smiled at Felicity, sat down beside her, and answered her eager questions fraternally. She looked prettier than ever, the virginal nymph of eighteen. But whilst she prattled he was thinking: "Did you smile like this at Alice? I have lost out of mind since he left you?" A slow rancour burned within him, the rancour of the man who was 'for it' against the man who meant (if he could) to stay at home, the rancour which if it had been turned and directed against the shakers would have made a shambles of England. Before Felicity beamed at him, when he had abandoned hope that Bessie would come back, this deadly rancour had assailed him against all the women who were untrue to the men who had to leave them. He could think of Mars and Venus as twin machine-guns in arms against the peace and happiness of the world.

He took leave of the Vyes and mentioned that he had promised to drink a cup of tea with Arthur Kerridge.

Upstairs, in the organist's house, his welcome took him aback. Nupke grasped both his hands. "My dear boy, how well you look! Sit you down—sit you

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down." But, for a moment, Enoch stood still surveying the untidy familiar room and his kind host with his odd felicities of gesture. On the hearth-rug, Drake, Nunkle's Aberdeen terrier, was wagging his tail, too middle-aged to frisk about, but with a twinkle in his eye as much as to say: "Old age, I do abhor thee!" The piano, upon which Enoch had practised five-finger exercises, was open; books and sheet music lay upon the carpet; a table was spread with a generous tea; the curtains were drawn; the fire burned steadily; and a certain richness of memory, a warmth of recollection, seemed to enfold Enoch delightfully.

"I thought of asking little Felicity Vye to join us, but I wanted you alone, Enie."

"Nunkle, it's good to be here."

He sat down. Drake laid his head upon the boy's knee and looked up. Did he, the wise old dog, understand?

"Drake is trying to tell you that in dogdom you are highly commended." Nunkle chuckled, rushed at "Punch," and dashed off a few bars of Leshe Stuart's "Soldiers of the Queen." In a jiffy he was at "Judy" rumbling out another march, but turning his head to glance at Enoch. Then he jumped up, struck an attitude, tapped his head, and exclaimed:

"You perceive any impairment of intelligence?"

"Nunkle, I repeat: 'it's good to be here'!"

"You don't want to fetch Felicity?"

Enoch, sensible of tension, hesitated, and then shook his head, wondering whether he was blushing through his tan. So all along, Nunkle had known something, or guessed.

"She's a dear good little maid, Enie."

"Nunkle, what are you at?"

"I must make the tea."

"You and Drake are puzzling me --"

"Ah—ha! Drake and I are onlookers. As a

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Collegian, with a profound veneration for our Founder and his hundred charter. I find myself quite unhappy when I reflect that do—yeve not suffered in our prom— What did the Vicars Choral do without dogs?

Drake growled.

“Never growled,” said Enoch.

“Of course they did! The old sea dog knows; don’t you, Sir Francis?” Drake wagged his tail. “He and I have talked things over, and perhaps, whilst the tea is drawing I may add to a few more remarks to him, not you. He opened his caddy. “One heaping spoonful for the Bismarck of the Seas, who singed the beard of the King of Spain; another for Private Enoch Smart, and another for silly old Nunkle. The water is on the boil, we have two minutes—” *SHUN—!*”

Drake sat up.

“Star! Fress!”

Drake stood in front of his master, as Enoch guessed what was coming. For inscrutable purposes of his own Nunkle was conjuring up the past. Enoch could remember three Drakes. The original Drake, albeit an Alderlington, had come from Plymouth. When he died (according to Nunkle) his valiant spirit passed into the body of the puppy who succeeded him. As a choir boy, as a piano pupil, Enoch—in this very room

—had listened again and again to scathing remarks upon himself made to Drake. And then—at the end of the jobation—Nunkle would turn to the squirming culprit—“Now you know what Sir Francis and I think about you.”

Nunkle, sitting at the tea-table, addressed his dog as of yore.

“I am—ay to you, Sir Francis, in strictest confidence, what I might hesitate to say to anybody else. We have both of us, a warm affection for two Collegians who shall be nameless. We do not hold the ladies of

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the Walk in too high esteem. But there are exceptions, my *Pride of Plymouth*. Say 'Aye, aye, sir'." Drake barked twice. "Good! You agree with me. Some months ago we had a chat about these two Collegians. Inasmuch as the business of the world must be carried on, we agreed that this precious pair might help to do it. We watched you and I, a very shy boy and a pretty maid smiling at each other, and we said 'This is the real right thing.' And then, *presto!* they seemed to drift apart. Well, well, we shrugged our shoulders, and, if my memory doesn't fail me, you remarked: 'Oh the pity of it!'" Drake wagged his tail. "But we still hoped for the best. To our dismay a piratical rascal with black Latin blood in his veins came sailing into our harbour and dropped anchor. The pretty maid blushed as well she might, at the sight of him. And, most unhappily, the shy young man was far away. But I cannot believe that she had forgotten him. Anyway nothing happened. The rascal was constrained, sorely against his will, to up anchor and away. And then the shy young man came back. All is sad, Ennie, my boy, I hope your tea will be to your liking."

He filled a cup and handed it to his guest.

9

It was a heaven-sent opportunity. Perhaps, if we reach the farther shore, we shall know that life on this side, with all its difficulties, anomalies, perplexities and pitfalls, would be a simpler affair, if we sought help from others and had the courage and wisdom to accept it. Unhappily, the right consultant can do nothing for his patient unless he knows all the facts of the case. Two men in Fountains, the Dean and Arthur Kerridge, could have saved Enoch Saint from himself had he

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[illegible]

November 1. I must have stripped himself bare to the four winds of heaven if it had known why Bes and I left him alone and him. That unanswered question had become a secret, creasing numerous growths. It pained him more than it bothered other women. Worse, he knew that he was drifting towards the amoral code of the camp, likely to accept women as the playmates of the hour, edging the companionship of those who demanded nothing except a good time.

He drank his cup of tea in silence. After an inter-
mittent pause, Nunkle asked for details about a
soldier. He:

I recently Nunkle played, whilst I nock smoked. Not till then, a word about to part did Bessie's name crop up. Nunkle may have introduced it with intention, he may have recalled Bessie's alluring smile on Cathedral Green. He said abruptly:

“I want to get information about Bessie Custard?”

100

I love it. It and said hard things about that
 you. It and my out after you had joined up that
 you to change either and that your championship

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had provoked something of a rumpus. A feather in your cap, I'm sure. Probably he heard all about it. If she regards you as a friend she may have written to you."

"No."

"Then you are as much in the dark as we are."

"Yes. But my sister has hit a feathering clip. Judith thinks that she may have gone to her mother's people."

"M'm."

"You don't think so. What do you think, Nunkle?"

"After she left Willie Hills joined up."

"Good for him."

"So we said. But he had declared most impatiently, his intention of not joining up. I have an idea my boy, which I'm only sharing with you and Drake, that Willie may have joined up because Bessie left the Walk. One night before she left I saw them together."

Enoch made a desperate effort to look unconcerned.

"Why not?"

"Only this. I caught them unaware. I was fussing about in my garden. I wanted to get something in the town. I hurried out of my gate. They were standing in the street. Bessie looked as if she had been crying, but her grandfather was lying dead in his house. Willie had a hang dog air. I had the feeling that they had quarrelled. The funeral was next day. Within a week of the funeral Bessie bolted. Soon afterwards Willie took the shilling."

If there was more to be said, Nunkle, as Enoch reflected afterwards, did not say it. For the last time, Enoch resisted the temptation to speak out. More, he dissembled with his old friend, assuming the rôle of lippetary Tommy as he took leave of him. Nunkle watched him swinging down the Walk. Would he enter the Vye house? No. Nunkle frowned, muttering to himself. Then he re-entered his house,

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where Price was waiting him. He addressed Sir
Francis as follows:

"You and I have now told our story; that all is
settled, and I am a saint."

"Do not interrupt."

CHAPTER VI

Instabilities

I

ABOUT the middle of January Private Surt found himself in the mud of a base camp in France where he underwent super-intensive training before taking his place in the fighting line. To those who have accepted *All Quiet on the Western Front* as an authentic record, Inoch's devil may care attitude toward the war may seem incredible, bearing in mind what sort of young man he was when he joined up. Montaigne would have understood his 'undulancy'. Left alone with books and perfunctory clerical duties, 'glumming' over bludgeonings, he might have degenerated into a self-centred hypochondriac. The war rescued him from that, the war made a man of him. But when he embarked for France, he had joined the noble army of fatalists with Young Alf's label attached to him. "A queer duck." If greatness is thrust upon some men, so is popularity. Inoch didn't seek popularity. It came to him because he could sing and play the piano, it lingered with him because he was ready to place his wits at the service of others. He refused to "grouse" or grumble. Physical fitness is, to be sure, a tremendous asset to a private soldier. Inoch had worked hard to make himself fit, he gloried in his fitness. He became popular in his platoon, because joy in fitness radiated out of him. His rival in popularity was a Cockney who had sold papers in Trafalgar Square. At one of the sing-songs Inoch impersonated a Wessex bumpkin visiting London for the first time—the butt

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of the Cockney. After that they did several "turns" together. Drinking the smallest of small ale, smoking the eternal "fags," Enoch was accepted as "one of the blokes." He read aloud items of news; he commented upon the utterances of pundits; he did what the others did. His Company Commander, after noting that a grin was forthcoming (as prescribed), now and again passed the time of day. Enoch gathered from him that Authority wanted the men to work and play strenuously. Then, so it was hoped, there would be no time for thought. Enoch put thought from him. He played "House," the only permissible game, in the canteen; he played "Pontoon," "Brag," and "Kitty Nap" on the sly. Now and again, dodging the red-caps, he "got off with a bit of skirt" and studied the French language at close quarters. . . .

Even then, so early in the war, the legend that every Hun bullet had its billet passed from mouth to mouth. After Enoch's baptism of fire, whenever luck stood stoutly by him, somebody would be sure to say: "Your bullet hasn't been made yet."

The Dean, Nunkle, Mrs. Vye, and his mother sent him "parcels."

Before he left the base-camp, he heard that Young Alf was in France, serving as a liaison officer at Le Havre, and likely to remain there till the end of the war, safe, handsomely paid, and wearing a Sam Browne belt——! Damn Young Alf! Of Willie Hiles not a word.

2

By this time Enoch could be reckoned a soldier ear-marked for promotion. But he regarded even the remote possibility of a commission as he regarded the ever-present Hun bullet. *Anything* might happen.

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He was a King's Corporal when a parcel reached him (forwarded by his mother) bearing a London postmark, with no covering message. Inside were three silk handkerchiefs and in the corner of each his initials beautifully worked. He remembered that Bessie had been a clever needlewoman.

She must have sent them.

This upset him ; and he was tempted to destroy the gift or hand it over to a pal. Bessie had become a wraith of the past. At intervals, after too much bully beef, he would dream of her. The dream invariably was the same, an absurd, troublous, inconsequent effect of indigestion. He and she were apart ; he wanted to get near her ; but she remained tantalisingly out of reach, within sight but out of hearing, smiling and beckoning.

He did not use the handkerchiefs ; he put them aside.

3

It had been a disappointment when young Dyson was sent to another regiment. In Enoch's company there was not one man who had known him at home. When he reached the base-camp in France, fun, as usual, was poked at his name. Private Peter Smith, the Cockney seller of newspapers, had asked jeeringly : " I sy, wot did yer best gurl sy to yer, when she kissed a bloomin' saint good-bye ? " Enoch retorted suavely : " What your girl did not say to a misbegotten sinner like you. My girl hopes to kiss me again. Your girl must be thinking of kissing somebody else." Peter Smith grinned. " My mistyke, my lord, me an' you are goin' to be pals." He predicted truly. Shortly afterwards Privates Smith and Saint were included in a fatigue party told off to fetch officers' baggage from the railway station. The train was very late ; and an

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estaminet stood within a hundred yards of the platform. "Corp," said Mr. Smith to the corporal in charge, "is there any chance of a wet? My gentleman friend here," he indicated Enoch, "hasn't the ghost of a spit left?" The corporal let the pair fall out for a few minutes. After slaking their thirst Mr. Smith espied a cottage and chickens in coops. Enoch and he lifted two chickens. Inasmuch as Mr. T. Atkins was overcharged right and left by the "Frenchies" this was regarded by Enoch's platoon as "getting one's own back." After that, Enoch and his metropolitan associate went on lifting anything that might add to the comfort or nourishment of His Majesty's troops.

A queer friend for "Gentleman" Saint. The platoon called him "Gent." Mr. Smith was responsible for a wild story that Enoch was a lord or the son of a lord. Didn't he talk like a horficer? Didn't he know Latin? It amused Enoch to let them think what they pleased. He became friends with an illiterate wail of the London streets because he admired never-failing humour and alert, resourceful wits. He bestowed a nickname on him: "Pick-me-up Pete." Pete owned up to Enoch that he too dared not think.

"Are we down'arted, Gent? Yus—we are. But, s'trewth, that's a blinkin' secret. I knows enough to be scared stiff, so do you, but we kid ourselves we're brave as larin' 'yenas, wot?"

"Nearly all animals are cowards," said Enoch.

"Yer don't sy——! Come to think of it, Gent, we might, if we was foxy, get lightly wounded. S'pose, for fun, that me an' you 'eld up our 'ands when snipers was abaht. Wot 'o fer 'ome sweet 'ome."

"Or—shot at dawn behind the lines."

"Narsty—very narsty."

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4

In June Enoch was laid low by a flesh wound not grave enough to warrant a return to England. During a short period of convalescence he had a mild flirtation with a nurse, no beauty but a right good sort. The affair, such as it was, would have provoked a smile from the Dean, but it served further to enlighten inexperience. The nurse had been a militant suffragette. Perhaps it amused her to make a clever boy see her objectives, surprised to find a West-countryman who carried a singularly open mind. She gasped when Corporal Saint told her that he was the son of a verger; she laughed when he went on to mention Mrs. Vye's indictment of the shrieking sisterhood.

"We had to shriek," she explained. "I loathed all that. But, you see, we never got anywhere so long as we behaved like perfect ladies. We made ourselves insufferable nuisances. It simply had to be done. Now—make a guess why I took up nursing?"

"The urge of the ministering angel——?" he suggested.

"I was deadly dull at home, a servant without a servant's wage. Be good, pet, and you'll be happy. Tosh! Be happy and you'll be good. Be healthy and you'll be happy. That's my slogan. Do you know anything about women?"

"I know enough to leave 'em alone."

"What!"

"You can take my statement or leave it for what it's worth."

"It's worth nothing. It's personal. Some girl has misbehaved. Well, there are others. Shall I tell you what I take to be the big mistake that most men make in their dealings with us women?"

"Please do."

"You divide us into two classes, good and bad.

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You see no good in the bad and no bad in the good. You may not believe it but I belonged to the goody-goody lot - the kind what-you're-told and thank-you-everybody-for-it's - Revolving - -!"

"You're right!"

"I've got fed up with the sham and humbug of it. And the girls believe that butter won't melt in a father's mouth - such hard luck on you men, if - if, mind you, it ever comes. Perhaps you, brought up in your turn of old Vicars' Walk, had the cheek to think that you were entitled to a sweetie, a little pink of perfection."

"Perhaps I did."

"Fine - are you did. And then, may be, she disappointed you?"

"No complaint, nurse."

"I thought you - Sound like it. Know anything about horses, corporal?"

"Less than I know about women."

"That's a pity. But, the other day, one of my patients, who was a groom in a big stable full of hunters, told me that a perfect hunter might be found once in a life-time - but men go on buying horses just the same, and take them as they find 'em. Why can't they do that with women. We do it with men."

"You mean you do it?"

"Why, yes," she laughed, detecting a twinkle in his eye. "I shan't ask too much from the man I marry - if I do marry."

"And if you don't?"

"Corporal that's not worthy of the Duke of Merion - Light Infantry. If I don't marry, I shan't be sorry about it, or wear the willow."

When they parted, they shook hands.

"You're a dear boy; I shall miss you. When this filthy war is over, keep an eye open for the girl with no nonchance about her, and one with a not too pretty

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head on her shoulders. "Why do the pretty fools play such hell with you clever men?"

"Doctrine of compensation," replied Enoch.

5

He returned to his battalion to learn that Pete was dead, blown to bits by a shell, killed in the trenches. There were other pups in his platoon. Soon afterwards he was promoted sergeant, and had to assume a sergeant's responsibilities. His Colonel and the Adjutant knew him by name and reputation. He was regarded as a man to be trusted at a push, and reckoned also to be lucky.

In August, 1915, Abel Saint died. Enoch applied for leave which was granted, and arrived in Beaumonts before the wreaths upon his father's grave had withered. A signal honour had been a last tribute from the Dean. His veiger was laid to rest in that lovely mead between the cathedral church and the Bishop's palace, where bishops, deans, major and minor canons and a chosen few collegians from the Walk are buried. Enoch recalled a heart-burning phrase: "Officers Only." At Paris Plage, and how many other places, Mr. Thomas Atkins was told that his room was preferable to his company. Later on, when the V.A.D.'s, and nurses were blooming like columbines all of a row, Mr. Atkins had to survey their bonny faces from a disrespectful distance. They, too, were self labelled: "Officers Only."

Abel Saint had been a non-commissioned officer of the temple. It was fitting that he should lie where he did. R.I.P. Vicars' Walk believed that his wife would soon lie beside him. She appeared to be half-dead already.

A sad home-coming, the sadder because Felicity was

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nowy warden as a VAD in the house of a county nurse. But I tell you let time Lnoch told me that the little man as yet too much for him. I told him that he had provoked this and that. 'If I come home a few miles at me I'll send him to the moon and win the little maid at I'll win'.

My Aunt said him and shed tears. Words pour out of her.

'Oh, dear, dear! Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Was he thinking of Lnoch or his father? Oh, if you come back? You've done your bit, but you know I me my Joe made sure that you were safe and the old Alfred Kerridge. I told him that I've given him a new lease of life. Then I have lost a couple of tone. The funeral was lovely and I've missed that. The bishop sent a wreath that cost thirty shillings. I've specially told me to give you her love and sympathy. The pore child can't do enough to eat where she is. She has a full notion that she'd like to go to France. Oh, dear, dear, dear! this war is getting serious, isn't it? And they're talking now of conscription. You've heard about Lucy Panter's brother? No? Some girl handed him a white feather. So he just made up his mind that he'd join up and get turned down. I've aller and he was round the corner when brains was served out. Anyway, he joins up, pert and perky, and goes before the Medical Board in Bristol, a-wearing an old truss that belonged to his uncle who died. The doctor had a rare game with him, so they tell me, pull the bone free and said that he couldn't pass him. And then when he got tired of playin' cat an' mouse, he up and says to Harry: 'Tell me, my man, how long have you worn that truss?' Harry answers as bold as brass: 'For more'n three years, sir.' At that the doctor rounds on him: 'Is that really true,' he

says 'Perhaps you will tell me why you've worn it upside down all this time.

Enoch laughed heartily that Mr. Vye had

'I didn't ought to have told you that I did.

'Thank God' you did. It would do our heads of drinks in our canteen.

'It's not every one that serves in a canteen - the wife of the Doctor's very.

'I'll pretend that Mr. Vye told me.

'My! how clever you are! But I can tell you that young Alf Keridge is a monster. He was sitting in your chair not a month ago with his mouth wide a fan-trot. Frenchy, I say.

Extra French,' said Enoch, shaking his eyes. 'Any news of Willie Hiles?

'I was going to tell you about Willie all in good time. I hope I'm a good Christian woman, but at times an again I've said a bad word when I've thought of you up to your eyes in mud and mire and Willie baking bread in England.

'Baking bread?

Enoch smiled. Willie had been apprenticed to a baker in Lountains, but he was discharged for incapacity.

'I'm glad I don't have to eat his bread,' went on Mrs. Vye. Willie, so he continued, had joined the Army Service Corp, and actually had distinguished himself as a football player, whether his bread was fit for human consumption or not. Very discreetly he had not spent any leave in Lountains. In fine, the less said about Willie the better. He was and always had been a disgrace to the Walk, likely to bring his poor mother's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

'It's my belief,' concluded Mrs. Vye, 'that Bessie Custard is with him.

'Why do you say that?' asked Enoch calmly.

'I didn't ought to say it, Enoc, after what you said

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about the girl in this very room, but I knew well enough that he was no friend of yours and that you took for part nobly, yes, nobly, 'cos you're a noble young man. Well, don't, I'm not a-going to have another *fool* up with you, but I will say this: the two of you think as thieves an' larkin' about together all sort of the day and night. And weren't not told ere that they talked politics."

"Extremely impro'able," murmured Sergeant Saint.

b

Next day, he walked to the glade on the hill overlooking Leontine. He had drifted away from the stability of the walling in a shadow land. From the edge of the copse he could see those familiar levels—the Green, the Precincts, and the broad placid moat, but they had lost significance; they meant nothing, almost nothing, till the war was over. He sat on the stable arm of which Bessie had leaned and thought of her temptations. "I'd learned about women from her." But he'd learned more from the talks in the canteen, in the sergeants' mess, and from what officers were reported to have said about the faithless Many. Against them stood out the faithful Few, like his own mother. But she had never been a flesh and blood woman. He recalled a sermon of the Dean's preached long before the war. It had affected Enoch, because of its biting, humiliating self application. The Dean took as a text the sinner that repenteth and the rejoicing in heaven over his repentance. He had spoken ironically of those who reckon themselves to be proof against temptation because temptation has passed them by. Every Levite in Levites' Row was present and the Dean's own congregation who sat in the chancel with the Rood Screen and the Organ loft

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between them and the nave. This cutting off of the nave had been a grievance with the Dean ever since he came to Fountains. But it was pointed out at the time that the seating capacity of the chancel sufficed. Fountains was a small town with relatively a huge cathedral church. But the Dean knew that had the nave been available, the *outsiders* would have drifted in. The insiders could be reckoned as the elect and select, constant in attendance, traditionally devout, folded sheep obedient to the voice of their shepherd. Many had grown old in grace; the young people were only too painfully aware that the withdrawal of the benedictions of the church might mean social excommunication; the middle-aged were mostly Laodicean and reactionary, content with the spiritual fare provided, self-satisfied and inclined to be Pharisaical when speaking of those without the sacrosanct pale.

During the Dean's sermon the latter stirred uneasily in their cushioned seats. Some believed that they had been tried and were not found wanting. But the Dean made it scathingly plain that virtue is often anemic, too indolent to stray from the appointed path, too fearful of consequences. Could such virtue be extolled as virtue? The Sunday sirloin and the doze afterwards refortified the Laodiceans, but not Enoch. He was distressfully sensible that his abstentions were due to weakness rather than strength. In his imaginary lapses, when he became a devil of a fellow, he was always physically strong. . . .

However, thinking of Bessie, he decided that she couldn't be with Mr. William Hiles, the slirker.

7

The family solicitor confirmed all that Abel Saint had said about his unfortunate investments. Mrs.

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Sant had her annuity. Enoch, as residuary legatee, would have what each was in the bank and a now worthless bundle of certificates. After the war some might have value. Nobody living could give an opinion one way or another about that.

A talk with the old doctor who had brought him into the world followed. Dr. Guinion did not live in Vicars' Walk, but Enoch thought of him as a Levite. Probably he knew the Levites and their ways better than the Dean. To Enoch's amazement Dr. Guinion was optimistic if you could use such an absurd word.

About Mrs. Sant's health. An anxious son was informed that his mother might live for another ten years.

"Without my father?"

"She is sound organically, she appears to hover between the quick and the dead, but she makes no demands on life. I thought she would go when you were born."

Enoch absorbed this having faith in a shrewd general practitioner. Nobody spoke of Dr. Guinion as up to date, but now and again his native common-sense confounded younger physicians. Enoch's thoughts had flown to his mother as he had left her not half an hour previously, sitting upright in a chair and reading the Bible. The doctor's voice seemed to come from a distance.

"I thought you would go with her."

Enoch nodded having heard this before. The doctor might have further comments to make. He had.

"And I was mistaken, Enoch. Let me tell you something, a professional secret. I was not clever enough to find out what was the matter with your gland, but I do know why you are a fairly robust man to-day. You were kept in cotton wool for the first sixteen years of your life. You were not allowed to overstrain yourself. Your mother has lived the

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same sort of quiet life. She has reserves of strength which do not appear on the surface, she has also—ambitions.”

“Ambitions?”

“For you. Unhappily she is entertaining a fixed idea that your father is waiting for her.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“I suggest, Enoch, that you should encourage her to live on to see you taking your father’s place.”

“But we’re dying like flies over there.”

“She has faith that you will be spared.”

“Why should I be spared?”

“Why indeed? But your mother believe what she wants to believe, a sustaining conviction to her.”

Enoch remained silent, uncomfortably aware that an old friend expected a declaration from him and that he had a right to expect it. It would be so churlish to shrug his shoulders and march out of the room. Again he heard the doctor’s voice still remote.

“Are you going to tell her that you want to take your father’s place? Such an assurance from you would be an *elixir vite*.”

“I’ll tell her anything, *anything*, even the damndest lie, if it will help her, poor dear,” said Enoch vehemently.

“But I’m not going to lie to you. I—I don’t know where I am. I appear to be sitting in this room talking to you, but really I’m where you say my mother is—hovering between the quick and the dead. And the quick seem to be dead, and the dead seem to be alive. Just now, alone with my mother, she seemed to be dead; but my father is alive to me, a dominating influence. And some of my pals who died beside me are more alive than the colonel of our battalion. I see everything here through a mist, particularly my past life. Because you’re a doctor, because you are so familiar with death, you may understand. I—I

Vicars' Walk

don't know. Are there any landmarks left? Are there any beacons?"

Dr. Guinion got up, walked to the window, and stood with his back to Enoch, drumming with nervous fingers upon the pane. He guessed that this quiet, self-contained man whom he had only known as a clever boy, and who suddenly seemed to have changed into somebody else, had never spoken with such intensity of feeling till this moment. What he had suppressed had burst out of him provoked by a chance remark. Conceivably Enoch Saint might break down. His eyes were flashing, with the pupils no bigger than a pin's point; his lips quivered; his scholar's hands twitched. . . .

"Come here, my boy," said Guinion, not looking round. When Enoch stood beside him, he slipped an arm about his shoulder. The upper half of the window, with its early Georgian sashes, was open. The room faced west; and the house stood to the north-east of the cathedral church upon ground much higher than the Precincts. Looking through the windows of this room which served as library and consulting room, one could see a small old-fashioned garden enclosed by a privet hedge about four feet high. Between a pair of elms, the Chapter House, the Lady Chapel, and the central tower, were alone visible. With his free hand, the doctor indicated the tower.

But, wisely, he said nothing.

8

Because he said nothing, Enoch was the more sensible of what he might have said, and went away, shortly afterwards, carrying a higher head. He carried it, still erect, into his mother's presence, beholding her with different eyes—determined—lie or no lie—to do what he could to lengthen her days.

Instabilities

An attenuated smile flickered about her lips as he bent down and kissed her.

"I've had a chat with Dr. Gunnion," he began. "He cheered me up a bit about you."

"Did he? Doctor means well. Told me I might make old bones. I am old bones. I told him that I couldn't keep your dear father waiting. He is waiting, Enie."

"Now, mother, I don't believe he is."

"I never did keep him waiting, and I'm not going to begin now."

Mrs. Saint's determination not to keep her husband waiting stimulated Enoch's wits.

"But, Mother, if I could prove to you that Father wasn't waiting--"

"You prove it, Enie, if you can."

"Right. I will. Before the war he bought you an annuity. Why? So that you should be provided for in the event of his going before you. Now would he have done that if he hadn't hoped that you'd live on just as long as you could?"

Mrs. Saint considered this with her head on one side. Then she admitted guardedly that her Abel was not the man to waste money.

"Why should I live on?" she asked.

"To keep house for me, when I'm a verger."

"What do you say?" she asked quaveringly. "Do you *want* to be a verger?"

"Yes."

"You *want* to live here in our Walk?"

"I do."

"You aren't saying this to please me?"

"No."

Three lies entered, let us trust, to Enoch's credit account by the recording angel. Mrs. Saint sighed, half closing her eyes.

He gazed at her tenderly. It was difficult to believe

Vicars' Walk

that this frail creature had brought into the world two children. Enoch felt it to be so that she had ever inspired in him a confidence that it possessed. Enoch understood her better than he had been injured in her. Her delicate features, large blue eyes, the too narrow forehead, the slight tremor of her chin indicated weakness, but no weakness except physically. She had been an admirable teacher of children, kind, patient and firm, and the confidence had never deserted her throughout a quarter of a century of married life. To the last she had held the respect and affection of her husband. Was he capable of giving more than that to her son? Mrs. Ayle had said to him: "Your dear mother is so gentle!"

Reverend

If it would evoked ribald laughter from Mr. Atkins. Refinement to him did not mean purification, but the elimination of everything that came under the head of Ribaldism in pillory. Mrs. Saint conveyed to her son that refinement had turned her from wholemeal into superfine flour. No vitamins left!

Presently she spoke:

"I've been trying to see you, robed."

Enoch laughed, not loudly. The shaving-glass in his bedroom was about a foot square, but that morning, passing the draper's shop where Bessie had worked, he failed to recognise himself in a long narrow mirror placed at an angle near the main entrance. He had said to himself: "Who the devil is this?" One of his fellow townsmen was passing by when Enoch stopped him to remind him that his name was Saint. His thin, pallid face was now a brick brown in colour. Out of the brown blazed his blue eyes, frostily blue, the eyes of a dreamer now a deer. He strode along as became a sergeant in the Duke of Mercia's Light Infantry.

"Where are father's gowns?"

Instabilities

"I have his best, dear."

"Shall I put it on?"

"Enie, you're not making a joke of this?"

"No—and yes. I'm not a lightning change artist, mother. I look what I am—temporarily. Before I put on a verger's gown and assume his staff I may there is the sporting chance—I *may* wear a Sam Browne belt and what goes with it."

Mrs Saint became alert.

"An officer?"

He nodded.

"You want to be an officer?"

"Again, yes and no. As a sergeant I'm better off. If they gave me a commission I should probably be transferred to another regiment."

Her pale eyes brightened, a tinge of pink flowed into her cheeks.

"I should like to live to see my boy an officer."

"An officer and a gentleman?" he asked derisively.

"You are a gentleman, Enie."

He was about to reply that he was nothing of the sort, but his mother's face gave him pause. She looked as if resurrected from the dead. To his further astounding (and confounding) she spoke with animation:

"That hateful Alf Kerridge is an officer. Only a little fool would think *him* a gentleman."

"Have you any little fool in mind?" he asked gently.

"Yes, I have. Felicity Vye is a good girl, but she's a little fool."

"What do you know, Mother?"

"More than her mother knows."

"Tell me."

Mrs. Saint hesitated. Then she spoke bitterly.

"Enie, your father and I hoped that you and Fee would make a match of it. It seemed so just right I prayed that it might be, but perhaps I didn't pray

Vicars' Walk

hard enough ; and I couldn't get my mind off your father, knowing that he was failing every day. Young Alf came swaggering back from France about a month ago. Our bedroom window overlooks the back garden next door, as you know. I saw Alf Kerridge kissing Fee ; and she was kissing him in—in a most unmaidenly way. I've held my tongue, but Fee's mother can't hold hers. If she knew what I know she'd have told me. But she did tell me that Fee wanted to go to France. Then, of course, I put two and two together. If these two aren't engaged to each other, they ought to be."

"Quite."

"And—and you don't care ? "

"I—I want Fee to be happy."

"He'll make her miserable——"

"We don't know ; we can't possibly tell."

"He's a publican and a sinner. If Fee were my daughter I'd sooner see her in her coffin than married to him."

"They're not married yet."

"And the worst of it is," added the most devout and exemplary woman in Vicars' Walk, "that he's out of what they call the danger zone."

Enoch smiled and patted her hand.

9

Alone in his room he faced his lies in much the same spirit which sustained him when he faced Hun bullets. Like thousands and tens of thousands he was sure that he wouldn't survive the abomination of desolation. Believing this so firmly he had pledged himself to a future which he couldn't see.

Nevertheless he did see himself as unfit to wear a Levite's cassock.

Instabilities

What his mother had told him about Felicity put to flight an impulse to spend an hour or two in her company. Probably this could be more profitably spent with Nunkle and Drake. He drank tea with the Dean, who eyed him, so he thought, interrogatively. The nephew, young Dyson, was in hospital, badly wounded; the bishop had lost his eldest grandson. But everybody in Fountains, gentle and simple alike, were attempting to obey the injunction of the Wizard of Wales. The Walk in particular, "carried on" as before.

When he got back to his battalion, there was a new and grim joke in the Sergeants' Mess: "The last ten years of this bloody war are going to be the worst."

Towards the end of October, his chance came. He had to learn afterwards what he did from others, as so often happened. Automatically, he took charge of his platoon, when he and they were lost in blinding smoke and wire entanglements. The battalion suffered terribly. The officers leading Enoch's men were shot down; the sergeant major, assuming leadership, was badly wounded, gasping out to Enoch: "Do the best you can, Gent." *He never knew what he did.* But, wittingly, or unwittingly, he did the right thing till he, in his turn, became oblivious of his surroundings. He recovered consciousness in a field hospital. The colonel and adjutant of the battalion agreed that something must be done for Sergeant Saint. For gallantry under heavy fire, he was awarded later on the Military Medal. But, in the colonel's opinion, he had displayed resource and initiative in command of men. In fine, he was fit to receive a commission if he expressed a wish for such promotion. At the moment he was hardly able to come to a decision. The adjutant explained that he would return to England and then, when he was fit again, be attached

Victory Walk

to the world, and finally, after the usual training, be
the victor in the great contest.

I am not a fool, boy.

What is the matter, son-in-law?

Yes, sir.

Then I can tell you that we shall have to
lose you.

CHAPTER IV

Rehabilitation

I

LONG before the war was over Enoch wondered whether an old friend had pulled the strings on his behalf. He recalled uplifted, grizzled brows, and keen grey eyes deciphering, perchance, nature's hieroglyphics. Possibly Dr Gannon, with no influence outside Fountains, had said a word to the Dean indicating that the boy whom they knew so well was being tried too high. It is certain that somebody did something before Enoch left the O.I.C. He did not return to France, being duly gazetted to a regiment serving in Mesopotamia, where he remained (comparatively speaking, out of the danger zone) till he sickened of malaria towards the close of the war and nearly died.

As an officer and gentleman he was very short of cash, but accepted by his brother officers as a man who had done more than his bit; but Enoch, too sensitive, perhaps, was conscious of disabilities, recognising (and over-estimating) Stevenson's "barrier of associations which cannot be imparted". He had little in common with the subalterns; but he gained the friendship of his adjutant and the respect of his colonel.

The obscure form of malaria, which assailed him in 1918, reduced him to a skeleton before it left him. After the Armistice he came back to Vicars' Walk, a civilian honourably discharged from a profession that had no further need of his services.

THE HALL

2

But you see I was a child and he knew I was not old enough to understand that he was not to be trusted. He had told me once before that he was my father, but he had never told his mother. So I had to keep it a secret. I was only fifteen, but he was a man. He had a beard and a mustache and a pair of eyes that had looked at a great many things. And when he told me the problem he was facing, I felt as if I ought to help him. In his room, I had seen a picture of a man with a beard and a mustache, and I had seen the chimney-pot. And when he told me of his life as an orphan, I felt as if I ought to help him.

Mr. Sand put his hand on my head and said:

You don't put me in my bedroom. I put you there to make you the head of the family.

He told her, too, that she had decided to live for him, that he was the centre of her renewed activity.

Mr. Ave, in her turn, embraced him maternally. Her curves were less supple after the lean years, but her heart was a large one ever. She announced joyfully that she had adopted him with the consent and approval of Edy Sand.

I've come to call me off your foster mother, Eme. When you and my Unity were babies, you had lunch, after tea, at my expense many a time. Don't think I could have carried up to that before the war. Both Mr. Ave and my hope you'll look upon this house as your second home, and drop in without being asked when you feel like it. I do miss Lee something cruel.

I had married Young Alf within six months of Old Alf's death during the summer of 1918.

I wanted you to marry the child, she went on almost tearfully, but I desist, such an idea never

Rehabilitations

entered your head. You're to like your father, and getting more like him every day. But to the time I'm old and stiff and bent over, I forgive you. I think that I do *tho' I don't*. Mr. Vye, all right. I'll let a Lily Ball when you're fifty. Well, I don't need her any more, and he must be content. I'm a young fellow now, but when I do open my mouth I mean what I say. You can take it from me that you're Alf, not a good man.

He's a good fellow," he told Enoch without any returning conviction in his voice.

Mr. Vye shook her head.

Now, Enoch, if there's anything to be said about Alf Kerridge I'm going to say it, not you. Men have a morbid habit of sticking up for each other. I'd sooner tear me tongue out, roots and all, than throw it up to you that here in this very room, before the three of us, you accused me of shedding tears of joy over a dinner 'cos he had a rich father. It's no use denying it, that's what you did. And you was right. And I told Mr. Vye you was right, and later on I said as much to Lee."

"Did you?" Enoch was smiling, but he dared not display too great an interest in what to him was the tragedy of his inexperienced youth. "And what did Lee say?"

"Mercy me! What do all the young girls say now that this world is upside down?" She paused to sigh deeply as Enoch realised that comparisons were being made between two generations.

"I—I don't know what they say?"

"Course you don't, 'cos you're a man's man. Still, you *are* clever, and you must think a lot. Tell me, dear, in your wildest dreams did you ever see an unmarried mother in our Walk?" Enoch admitted, candidly enough, that such a vision had not been vouchsafed to him. Mrs. Vye went on vigorously.

Uncle's Walk

And just as she burst in, a very sad countenance.
"He's not a very good friend to Katherine now
that Alfred's out of the way. When will I, dear
Olivia, meet him? I don't want to see him
at all, but I must. I'll have to say something
now, though I don't feel inclined to do so about
your cousin. I'll tell him that once
the matter's settled. I'll show it to you and her
parents first. I'll have to tell you, too, Alf. Such
dreadful things!"

"I'll tell you, too," I interrupted. "I've said the remark to
Mr. Ascham. I've behaved in the duty on U.S.,
never."

"I'll tell you," I interrupted. "I've said the remark to
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Vicars' Walk

victim of forces he couldn't control and without vitality to control them. Nevertheless he knew that countless survivors of the war felt as he did—too tired to take initiative, content to drift with the current . . . He recalled Swinburne's sad stanza :

We thank with brief thanksgiving,
Whatever gods may be,
That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river,
Winds somewhere safe to sea

All Fountains congratulated him.

4

Nunkle, also a too captious critic, deplored the changes in the Walk. Was the good bishop writhing in his tomb, beneath his alabaster effigy, because Ann Mary Hiles, Willie's sister, was an unmarried mother, unblushingly living with her parents, and dandling a fatherless baby within forty yards of the Chapel? There had been talk of turning out Willie's father and mother; but they, poor souls, were so piteously wretched that Authority stood by them. Two Sumshion boys were dead; two Sumshion girls had returned from overpaid work in a factory, bringing with them bad language, bad habits, and a contemptuous disregard of discipline. Honest George had been overheard to murmur: "Queer stones out of my quarry!" However, Nunkle predicted readjustments, having whimsical faith in the Walk itself, the actual houses which had, so he contended, a righteous atmosphere. Nunkle told Enoch that Young Alf had inherited The Open Arms and five and twenty thousand pounds——!

"The wastrel," said Nunkle, "will be bankrupt in five years. I give him that—five years." He looked

Rehabilitations

comically like a judge sentencing a prisoner to penal servitude. "Is my nephew still a friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes; I haven't seen him for four years."

"He's changed for the worse, believe me. I put up with him, because of Fee. She comes dancing in here, prettier than ever. Why are women such shocking bad judges of men?"

"Why are men such shocking bad judges of women?"

"Drake knows—don't you, old Towsy-dog? But he won't tell."

"Did you assist, Nunkle, at the Kerridge-Vye nuptials?"

"Kerridge-Vye nuptials—! Yes; I went on her account. Nuptials—! What a word! By their words ye shall know them. And by their accursed mis-pronunciations. . . . The Americans think that they won the war. Dash it! They might give some credit to the Portuguese. But they have come over here and made our common tongue more vulgar than it was. Do you use American slang?"

"Sometimes."

"Don't do it before Drake, or he may bite you. Well, my boy, you are now pledged to uphold the dignity of Fountains. I want to listen to you enlightening and instructing the trippers. I look upon you as the right man in the right place. But you can't have it both ways——"

"You mean?"

"You know what I mean. We, you and I and everybody connected with the cathedral church, must walk very delicately, just because the others are mafficking."

"Not in Fountains."

"On our Green and in our Walk."

Vicars' Walk

5

Felicity and Young Alf were mafficking; not a doubt of it. They welcomed Enoch uproariously. It was impossible not to respond, even if you winced.

Alf had a ripe and ruddy countenance coloured (and likely to be soon discoloured) by high living. He affected a Gallic wit and Gallic gestures which to Enoch suggested that Alf, as a Gaul, might be divided into three parts: impudence—self-assurance—and vain-gloriousness.

"Here's old Enie, back from Mesopot. *Comment ça va, mon vieux?*"

"Am I to answer in Arabic?"

"Now, Fee, hark to the old dog! I'll bet he learned French from a French girl. Give him a kiss. Tell him that we're tickled pink to see him."

Fee demurely presented her cheek.

"It is good to see you, Enie," she said.

It was not quite so good to see her. Did she really like playing up to this roystering fellow, laughing at naughty stories, eating, drinking and making merry all the time? She had preserved, somehow, her look of virginal innocence and bloom. And Young Alf was still in love with her and proud of her. When Enoch kissed her, she blushed and laughed.

"I can talk French, Enie."

"Swear in it, perhaps."

"Alf and I went to Paris."

"Swelled it there, not half," added Alf. "I told the Bud that it would pay us to give attention to the best o' food. We have a *table d'hôte* dinner here every night. Good biz! The muck they set before travellers in this benighted country turns my stomach."

"And mine," said Fee. "We are going to redecorate the dining-room."

"And put in bathrooms. We're talking too of a

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motor service, a linking up between Fountains and the big towns. Cuddle up is my slogan. Accessibility, what ? ”

“ Your father did well without all that——”

“ Dear old Dad ! But I shall make pounds where he made shillings.”

In a Cambyeses’ vein, Alf proceeded to enlarge upon the possibilities of roadside inns about to be restored to the pristine glories of the good old days of posting and stage coaches. The motor car would revolutionise conditions, make travel easy, cheap and comfortable. Then the inns of England would flourish, if, mind you, the innkeeper marched with the times and understood his job. Did Enoch agree with him ?

“ At one place in France,” said Enoch, “ which was a small gold mine, the innkeeper was the cook ; his wife kept the accounts and his daughters waited at the table. No big overhead charges. Did Fee take lessons in cooking when you were in Paris ? ”

This provoked roars of protest from Alf and a pretty pout from Felicity.

“ Your mother made omelettes,” murmured Enoch.

He might have added too that old Mr Kerridge worked in the bar, in the stables, and was always present to welcome the coming and speed the parting guest. Nevertheless Alf impressed him as having sound business ideas. Then, bearing in mind what Nunkle had said, he suggested that it might be just as well to carry on along the old lines for a year or so. This suggestion was roared out of court.

“ The old ways are a wash-out. Come and have a squint at my new car—a beaut. I’m teaching Fee to drive her. Wait ! I’ve a very special cigar for you, old lad—no better baccy in the kingdom.”

After inspecting the new car, Enoch and Alf found themselves alone in the small room back of the bar,

Vicars' Walk

where old Alf had entertained his more particular friends

"I'm looking forward," said Alf breezily, "to some snug games of cards here. Is it true that you're a crackerjack at Bridge?"

"I played Bridge in Mesopotamia."

"Somebody told me that you were a top-notch."

"I shall not play cards in this town, Alf."

"*Nom d'un nom d'un nom!* Why not?"

"Because perhaps I've a sense of the fitness of things denied to you."

Alf took this good naturedly enough.

"Oh, all right! You know best. Do you remember that night when you drank your first glass of bubbly with me?"

"Perfectly."

"You told me—and I kept it to myself—that you and Bessie Custard had clicked."

"You used that word."

"Right! I did. Heard anything of her since she skipped out of this town?"

"No."

"Perhaps she treated you as she treated me? Dropped me, she did. I was mad about her. I wanted to marry her. She laughed at me. Built that way. Did she play that game on you?"

Enoch held his tongue.

"We were friends," he said slowly, after a long pause. "She wrote me a letter telling me that she was leaving Fountains. She had some money; and old Ambrose, before he died, told her something about her mother, just what I don't know. I answered that letter. I wanted to keep in touch, but from that day to this not a word."

"Mysterious, eh?"

"Very."

"You felt sore, as I did?"

Rehabilitations

"Naturally."

"Well, old lad, I believe I saw Bessie not two months ago."

"Where?"

"In little old London town. But I may have been mistaken. She was all dolled up and lying back in a car. I made up my mind to speak to her, because I'm sure she saw me. As I was crossing the road, her car moved on. In a jiffy it was out of sight. One thing more: I waved to her, but she took no notice."

"As you say—you may have been mistaken."

"Lay you a thousand to three I wasn't."

6

Rehabilitations.

Mademoiselle Printemps came a-dancing into the West Country, an oread in the Mendips, a dryad in the woods and fields, but a deceitful beauty none the less, promising so sweetly more than she could perform: a divine summer of peace and content. The Dean, much older and with a more ironic edge to his tongue, said to the junior verger: "I find it easier, Enoch, to believe in God than in man," another *dictum* which lent itself to sustained thought, inasmuch as Enoch had lost sight of God for more than four years. He came back with the rising sap, the fluting of warblers and the tender green of the beech trees. Enoch decided humbly that God had never left the noble cathedral church. Once more feeling for and love of *living* stones began to percolate through his tissues. He perceived no paradox in the asking for bread and receiving a stone, if you regarded bread as the material things of life and Christ as the foundation stone of the House Spiritual. That reading of a familiar text was, of course, a perversion, but it had significance. He had

Vicars' Walk

asked for bread which had been denied him ; now he was given instead the stones of the cathedral church.

He set about his duties with a renewed zest, which slightly provoked Mr. Joseph Vye, who bided his time, clucked to himself, and waited on opportunity. It came, as it always does.

" You mustn't take too much on yourself, me lad," he enjoined. " I have my rights and perks—and perks. When folks came from afar to hear you sing, it fair flustered our tenor. And now, folks are coming to hear you talk—— "

Enoch wondered how he could best handle this most delicate situation.

" If I were your son, Mr. Vye, you wouldn't feel that way."

" I don't know as I shouldn't, Enoch. I says to Mrs. Vye that it's all part and parcel of this Reign of Terror, if you know what I mean ? "

" But, honestly, I don't."

" I mean this horrid reign of youth and ignorance, usurpers all of 'em, cockin' a snook, if I may say so, at wisdom. It fair frightens me. I could, if I weren't the Dean's verger, use shockin' language about it. You know-it-all's give me the needle."

" I know so little," said Enoch.

" Wha-a-at ? "

" Of what really matters."

" M'm."

During the pause that followed Mr. Vye made so many cluckings that a passing tripper might have believed that he had laid the foundation stone of a new cathedral, but, somehow, staring in perplexity at Enoch's thin, lined face, resentment oozed out of him. The boy was such a good boy. And if—if he was over-zealous in the performance of his duties, wasn't that a fault on the right side ? Still, tips were dear to Joseph Vye ; and he had righteous pride in his seniority.

Rehabilitations

"Go easy with me, Enie," he muttered feebly.

Enoch grasped his arm. They were in the small room, where those two robed. The choir-boys robed elsewhere; the dignitaries had a noble crypt as their dressing-room. All this, from Mr. Vye's point of view, was ecclesiastically just as it should be, and traditionally right. There were two chairs in his cell: one (his own) was larger than the other, a sort of understudy of the Dean's chair in the Chapter House.

"What does matter?" asked Enoch abruptly.

Mr. Vye looked unhappy. His allusion to the Reign of Terror was not fortuitous. For several nights past, when Mrs. Vye was washing up after supper, he had dozed off in his chair with Carlyle's *French Revolution* on his knee.

"What does matter?" he repeated blankly. "Why everything here, if you ask me——"

He embraced with ample gesture the whole of the cathedral.

"Everything here is symbolic. But I need not say that to you. And everything is revelation, or ought to be, to those who can read the writing. I agree with you, sir; I think that everything here matters enormously and because our cathedral is so big, and so rich and so full of meanings and messages, I feel very small and insignificant."

"You've no call to feel that way, none. I'm your friend, and I'm proud of you, but I haven't your book learning nor your father's. In a manner of speaking you've made me feel small, same as your father did."

"I'm glad you spoke. I don't want to push myself forward; I don't covet your privileges and perks. I spend a good deal of time wondering why I'm alive."

"My boy, I can tell you. It's not my own idea. It's been said before—survival o' the fittest."

Vicars' Walk

Enoch, forgetting where he was, began to laugh. He had a jolly laugh, the secret of his popularity in his platoon; and when he laughed his blue eyes flashed and twinkled.

"Shush-h-h!"

"Oh, Lord! I was back in a dug-out. We talked about that there. I read something to the boys, some article written by a swell—I'm not sure it wasn't a bishop—and we all agreed that it was tripe, undiluted hog-wash, darned misstatement of fact——"

"Enoch, this ain't a dug-out."

"It's a place where a man, who isn't a fool, can tell the truth. Mind you, I'm not sure that this article wasn't written to buck up the *moral* of the nation. Anyway the writer got off this lying phrase. He said that God was using His pruning hook so that the fittest could survive; wiping out, if you prefer to put it that way, the surplus population. Jolly reading for us, eh, when we knew that the *best* were being taken. Does a gardener prune off next year's shoots? The fittest haven't survived, and that's the hell—I—I mean the puzzle of it. I should say that the unfittest have survived, the C.3 men, the shirkers, the conscientious objectors, the rag-tag and bobtail of the nation, and if they have their way we shall live, you and I, to see another Reign of Terror."

Mr. Vye betrayed alarm, almost consternation.

"You're too much for me, me lad. Heaven help us, you're talking after the war as that general talked before it. The Dean agreed with him. I wonder whether he agrees with you?"

"You can ask him, Mr. Vye."

"May be I will. You have the gift o' tongues. You must go on talking. On me word I believe that you was spared to speak up, frank an' free, as you have done to me. But you can't make a saint out of a Vye, nor a Vye out of a Saint."

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7

Meanwhile the Walk was readjusting itself to new conditions. Comedy impinged upon tragedy. Ann Mary Hiles and her baby were tragic figures to Mrs. Vye and Mrs. Saint, the more so because Ann Mary refused to admit that she had been guilty of a moral lapse. Indeed she informed the Collegians that she had done her bit for her boy who would have married her if he hadn't stopped a bullet. She greeted Enoch gaily the day after his return, and engaged him in talk, tickling his humour by the ingenuous remark that matters might be worse because she might have died when her baby was born.

"I went through the hoop ; and the babe is a bit of all right."

Ann Mary had been a nice, clever little thing. Cleverness in young girls was held to be a disability by Mrs. Vye. After the war the matrons, speaking of the "gurls" generally, kept on repeating : "They know more than we do about things as can't be mentioned." And this youthful knowledge, a sealed book to genteel age, was fruit of the Tree of Evil, greedily gobbled, provoking terrible disturbances and upheavals, ramblings and scramblings, moral earthquakes.

Ann Mary said pertly to Enoch :

"Aren't you ashamed of being seen talking to such a norful warning ? " Gigglingly she waited his reply, not altogether at her ease, because Enoch had been a T.G.

"I've hardly uttered. How's your mother ? "

"Oh, Ma's still going on as if she'd had the baby and wasn't allowed to be churched. Were you coming in to see her ? "

"Yes."

"Pa and Ma will be honoured."

"Where's Willie ? "

"He won't come home till he has to. Willie is the

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big bad lad of the village. All the same he paid for my kiddie's pram, sent me a fiver. Tell me a funny story, Enoch ; or shall I tell you one ? ”

“ Do.”

“ Nellie Sumshion swears it's true, gives names and all, says it reelly happened in a village outside Fountains. Not a twelve month gone one of our country bumpkins came back from France to find his wife dying. Just before she died, she looked up and said : ‘ Now, me man, don't 'ee marry agen. If you does, I'll claw my way out o' coffin, an' scratch Number Two's eyes out, yes, I will.’ Ten minutes afterwards she was dead, and three days later buried——”

“ Sounds too good to be true,” said Enoch.

“ You wait. Within six months the man married again, and someway it got to the ears of the second wife what the first wife had said. Fair put the wind up the poor soul. So she up and asked her husband what about it ; and he said : ‘ Yes, 'tis true, but knawin' 'er to be an 'ooman of 'er word, I takes my precautions like.’ ‘ Whatever did 'ee do ? ’ asked Number Two. ‘ Don't 'ee worry, dearie. *I buried me first face down in coffin*, I did, an' afore she gets herealong, her 'll have to claw her way slambang through to Australy ; so, once more, don't 'ee worry ! ’ ”

Enoch laughed, awarding marks to Ann Mary, who laughed with him. This story was a straw indicating the direction of a new current, flowing towards high hilarity.

In striking contrast to Ann Mary, he found her parents sitting in inspissated gloom. William Hiles, senior, was a carpenter, employed about the cathedral church as continuously as George Sumshion. Both he and Mrs. Hiles, so Enoch learned, suffered horribly from dyspepsia, brought about—so it was hinted—by Ann Mary's frailties. Again comedy bubbled and sparkled upon the surface of dark waters. Enoch was

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invited to sit down. Ann Mary was not present, except as a ghost of what might have been.

"Nigh to death's door, you've been, Mr. Saint."

"You call me Enoch."

"No," said Mrs. Hiles. "We've been brought very low. I can't bring meself to take a cup o' tea with a neighbour. And father feels as I do, don't you, dear?"

Mr. Hiles grunted assent, as his wife continued:

"I can say this to you, Mr. Saint, if God A'mighty loves those whom He chastens, He must think the world of us; but, I ask you, what have we done? And why should our children turn and rend us?"

"It's worth trying to find out——"

"I beg your pardon——"

"I mean that we are all up against something which has meaning if we could discern it."

"Anti-Christ," boomed Mr. Hiles. "He's here—in this room, in our Walk, in the Precincts—everywhere."

A fanatic spoke. Of all the Levites none, before the war, had been so rigid a stickler for the Levitical law as this thin, wiry, red-headed carpenter, who had skimmed off himself (and his wife) the cream of human kindness leaving nothing but sour butter-milk. Was this his punishment?

"Anti-Christ is not here, Mr. Hiles."

"Yes, he is."

"No. Anti-Christ would have turned Ann Mary out of this house."

The parents glanced at each other in stupefied silence as Enoch went on quietly:

"I honour you both for not doing that."

"We wanted to, but we couldn't," wailed Mrs. Hiles. "Lots of folks said it was our duty."

"They were wrong."

"Bless you for saying that," said Mrs. Hiles. "Makes it easier to call you Enoch again. We'd love to hear how you was raised from the dead. Mr. Arthur

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Kerridge's own words. One of old George Sumshion's grandsons was buried alive. Listenin' to what others have suffered makes things easier like for me and William."

Accordingly Enoch, clutching at the sole method of entertaining this hapless pair, related several "horrors" which, on homœopathic principles, seemed to mitigate the gloom. When he took leave, they begged him to call again, affirming that he had cheered them up.

Perhaps he had.

8

Honest George Sumshion needed no such entertainment. Here was a weatherbeaten rock—a Gibraltar of a man—proof against the slings and arrows of adversity, set in the faith that what had endured for centuries would continue to endure. He regarded his grandchildren, Nellie and Edie, as chipped chips of the old block. Even their use of unparliamentary language was excused on the plea that they said what he, too often, thought—! George, it is true, had two sons left and a brother, who worked on doggedly, rain or shine, *tenax in arduis*.

Within ten minutes of renewing acquaintance with Edie and Nellie, some years younger than himself, Enoch became conscious of becks and wreathed smiles. The young ladies were bent on conquest and self assured that no young man could be proof against modern methods of frontal attack. Perhaps this was the most startling change in them. They had discarded the old veils, thrown aside modesty and maidenly reserve, and now presented themselves for male inspection naked and unashamed.

They were not, however, as black as Mrs. Vye had painted them; and they took for granted that Enoch

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was as pleased to see them as they were to see him, and—which mildly amused Enoch—perfectly certain that he, as a young man, shared their progressive views.

“We’re going to have gay times together,” affirmed Nellie, the elder, “and Edie and I think that this filthy foul war had to be, ’cos we couldn’t stick the damned old ways.”

“Yes,” chimed in Edie, “and I say that us girls have earned a good time, and I’m ready to shout that from the housetops in our old Walk, even if the chimneys tumble down.”

“You needn’t shout it here, dear,” said Nellie. “I say that a girl can have just as good a time on the quiet, and perhaps a better. I don’t raise my voice as you do. It isn’t necessary, is it, sweetheart?”

Enoch was so confounded at being thus addressed that he answered lamely:

“Not at all.”

“I just knew you’d think as I do. Edie misses a lot o’ fun ’cos she scares the quiet chaps, and don’t you forget it, they’re the boys who know how to play the game. There was a natty little fellow in Bristol who blushed whenever Edie yelled at him, but he didn’t blush with me when we offed it into the country.”

To recover lost ground, Edie observed in lowered tones: “Enoch looks a dear, but not exactly a Glaxo baby. My! You are thin, Enie.”

Enoch explained that he had been affording board and lodging to a few millions of microbes. He was invited warmly to eat chocolates, with a broad hint thrown in that gentleman friends were more heartily welcome if they brought with them chocolates and—cigarettes.

Feeling rather a fool, he mentioned that he had seen the Dean, and had been offered and accepted a verger-ship. The girls exploded with laughter.

“Why do you laugh?” asked Enoch.

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"It's a scream——"

"It's bread and butter, you little idiots."

This was well received as a term of endearment. But, to his further confounding, the little idiots began to discuss him as if he were not present.

"Can he fill a robe?" asked Nellie.

"You bet he can. But I'm worried about one thing——"

"Yes?"

"If Enie shows me into a seat, it will break my heart if he doesn't sit beside me."

"When I see him with his wand, I shall think of the fairy prince."

"Same here. Will he wear his medals?"

"Not if he gives them to me as a keepsake."

Finally Enoch escaped.

But he was shrewd enough to know that George Sumshion's grand-daughters were jolly, larky, honest girls, and chameleons who reflected the colour of the factory where they had worked gallantly.

Now they were back in Vicars' Walk.

And so was he.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Tentacles

I

THE friskiness of mind of the Misses Sumshion was, so Enoch decided, unprecedented in the domestic annals of the Walk. Bessie would never have dared to talk as they did. Nevertheless both they and Ann Mary Hiles had to be dubbed Collegians, another of the Dean's quips made after he locked "out" the dwellers in the Walk and after they, in comic reprisal, had locked him "in". Till the Dean made this mild jest (with a sub-acid tang to it) nobody had spoken of the ladies as Collegians, but, as a matter of fact (pointed out to Enoch by the Dean) there was a clause in the original charter which so labelled *all* who lived in the Walk; and it had been named Vicars' College before it became Vicars' Close and ultimately Vicars' Walk. It amused Enoch to think of Ann Mary, Nellie and Edie as Collegians, and it occurred to him that he might use this as a lever to raise the tone of their manners and conversation. Here we get a glimpse of him as Don Quixote; but to understand the phase through which he was about to pass, it must be remembered that he had lost his physical fitness. A specialist in London had told him that he must remain on a rigid diet for at least two years.

What had affected him most, although he was unaware of it, was promotion from a sergeants' to an officers' mess. He had labelled himself *Temporary Gentleman* derisively; but, without any taint of snobbery, he adopted not necessarily a higher but a

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different standard in regard to social relationships. Had he remained a sergeant, he might have married any one of a dozen girls in and about Fountains. Unconsciously again, he demanded more than they could give, and he couldn't give what they expected from him. When he left the Sumshion house he knew that he could be friendly with Nellie and Edie but never intimate. Once more, he was thrown back upon those good and faithful companions, his books.

2

He promised himself the satisfaction of remaining the true friend of Felicity who might need a friend—did he hasten to meet or recoil from the thought?—before she was many years older. To establish friendship with Alf and his wife was the easiest thing in the world. Fountains accepted Enoch Saint as Mrs. Kerridge's elder brother; Fountains believed that Felicity had married for love. So she had. But Enoch began to wonder whether love to her was not a greater thing than a lover. Alf, for the moment, was her lover, but he might—it was almost certain that he would—be faithless; and then little Fee would miss not the actual man but his attentions which, to do him justice, were delightfully manifested. He grudged her nothing; he had made her his wife, his pal, his business partner, and he was proud of her good looks and sweet ways. If he strayed from her, she would become the most forlorn creature.

It is likely that a very young married woman wanted to be sisterly not only to her oldest and best friend, but to a young man whom she had not treated too well. She had beamed at him. If he had beamed back—? But he hadn't. If he had, she would now be Mrs. Enoch Saint, living in the Walk, subject to its discipline, with nothing to expect of the future except—babies.

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Alf had Gallic ideas about babies. A Frenchwoman commandeered, so to speak, a baby, when it suited her convenience, or when she could afford to do the subject justice. Why not be practical? Fee's sisters had too many babies. Unity had three—and had lost her husband towards the close of the war.

The Open Arms, in fine, embraced Enoch; and even the gossips of the Walk were quite pleasant about it.

3

Nothing happened worthy of record during 1919 and 1920. By that time Enoch had laid aside his father's bundle of certificates as so much waste paper. Mrs. Saint had her annuity; her son had his salary and increasing tips. Together they did well enough.

In the autumn of 1920, an incident aroused curiosity in the junior verger. Ambrose Custard had been buried beside his father and grandfather within the Precincts in the quadrangle surrounded by the Cloisters. Now and again Enoch, when passing through the Cloisters, would pause to look at a child's tomb, a lovely bit of stonework, perfectly proportioned. The inscription surrounding the base had been effaced by time. None, not even the Dean, could hazard more than a vague conjecture concerning the child, except that he or she must have been a darling. The Dean, indeed, rejoiced in the effacement of the lettering because it gave play to his imagination. He spoke of it as the Angel's Shrine. An angel had come to earth in the form of a child, and, pining for Heaven, had died. And then this costly memorial had been erected, standing by itself, and bearing, as the Dean delightedly pointed out, the semblance of an exquisite miniature Lady Chapel. Antiquarians pronounced it to be three hundred years old at least. Hard by lay the remains of Ambrose

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Custard Whenever Enoch passed the child's tomb, he had a conviction that it would have been well for Bessie had she died when she was a child, because Mrs. Vye, prejudiced though she was, had honesty enough to admit that, as a child, Bessie captivated her and many others. Glancing from the child's tomb to the heavy stone above old Ambrose (with so little inscribed on that), Enoch was forced to consider him and his aloof relationship to his granddaughter. Thus, although Bessie, as has been said, was immeasurably distant, she still hovered in and out of Enoch's mind as a gossamer filament between the two tombs.

Upon the scrivener's stone, already encrusted with moss and lichen, Enoch perceived, to his amazement, a wreath fashioned out of bronze, a fine and delicate piece of craftsmanship. He hastened to the sexton, who told, prosaically enough, the following story. The wreath had been sent to him a few days previously, with typed instructions and a sufficient sum of money to carry them out. The sender, who gave no name or address, desired that the wreath should be attached to the stone. Whereupon the sexton consulted the Dean who admired the wreath and sanctioned its attachment. That was all.

It was enough to give Enoch a thrill. Bessie had not forgotten her grandfather. Nobody else could have sent the wreath.

He wanted to rush to the Deanery. He didn't because the Dean possessed uncanny powers of divination. *What is Hecuba to you?* might fall from his thin flexible lips.

What *was* Hecuba to him?

A memory, and a stain upon memory.

To his further amazement, knowing Fountains as he did, nobody spoke of the wreath; apparently nobody noticed it.

Tentacles

4

Aided and abetted by the Dean and Nunkle, Enoch became an ardent Collegian. It was a grievance to the Dean that the Walk was outside the jurisdiction of the Chapter ; but he hoped that it would remain what it had ever been—Levites' Row. Before the war, some of the Collegians had boarded and lodged half a dozen theological students. During the war this modest source of revenue ceased. In 1920 the students began to drift back. As the Dean hoped and predicted, they exercised an uplifting influence, even if they provoked scornful laughter from Nellie and Edie. After a year of uncivil war, in which age outnumbered youth, the Misses Sumshion quieted down.

Enoch was now cited as an example. He had become a pillar of the cathedral church. The Dean published his *Anecdotal History of Fountains*, expressing in a preface, obligations to the Saints, father and son. Visitors of distinction wished to meet Mr Enoch Saint. The senior verger pocketed more than his share of the tips, very precious ointment to him, admitting to Mrs. Vye that a wonder-child had grown into a wonder-man.

"Enie," said Mrs. Vye, "is the dearest boy in the world. Someway I can't think of him as a man."

Mrs. Saint, also, had enthroned her son upon a pinnacle.

Now and again he felt a mad urge to call a public meeting on the Green and explain himself. He could hear himself addressing them quietly, as he talked to the tourists : " You see a verger in this glorious House of God ; and you know that his name is Saint, and you are such damned fools that you think him saintly. But he's doing what he loves to do, simply because he's not fit to do anything else half as well. He's not a full-blooded man ; think of him, if you like, as a caterpillar crawling from leaf to leaf, with no inclination whatever

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to leave the splendid tree which shelters him ; think of him as a servant ; think of him as a weakling who at heart resents his weakness. Don't think of him as a saint, because he'd like, if he had the vitality, to be a jolly sinner and punch some of your thick heads. Put this into your pipes and smoke it—— ”

As he began to recover from the after-effects of the malaria and anæmia, he wondered whether the cathedral church could hold him bond against his will. It gripped him as it had gripped his father ; it had become a living force ; he felt restless and ill at ease away from it unless—and this was significant—unless he cut entirely loose from its radiations. He had paid two or three visits to his sister in London. John Wintle was now a prosperous man. Both Judith and he agreed that Enoch needed “ bucking-up.” They made a special effort to entertain him handsomely. Enoch was taken to plays, concerts, picture galleries, and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

What warmed him to the core was Judith's never-failing love. Wifehood and motherhood had not impaired that. She could remember him as a delicate child ; she rejoiced when he became stronger ; she marked the extraordinary physical improvement after he joined up ; and then, on his return from Mesopotamia she grieved over the ravages of his disease. Judith was the one woman, perhaps, in whom he might have confided, sure of her sympathy, had he not acquired that trick of silence which, if persistently indulged, becomes a habit.

Upon his last visit to London, she had noticed a marked change for the better ; he was less self-absorbed ; a twinkle had come back to his eyes. Judy's prosperous appearance provoked chaff. She looked as if she belonged to the idle rich ; she had an urban air ; it was not easy to think of her as born and brought up in the Walk.

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"Are you quite satisfied with your humdrum life, you dear old fellow?" she asked him.

"I am."

"You must be different from the men I know."

"Perhaps."

"But why should you be? The only answer to that which I can think of is the Walk. I escaped from the Walk. And——"

"Yes?"

"Well, I—I couldn't see the Walk clearly till I got away from it. I believe it's haunted."

"Judy——!"

"By the old Vicars Choral before the Reformation. They lived alone. I'm not a spooky person; I'm not psychic; but I believe—and so does Johnnie—that thoughts live. I always loved the Dean's story about the thought-forms in church—you remember?"

"Oh, yes, a parable."

"I don't think the Dean meant it as a parable. He told us that thought-forms couldn't leave this earth. He wanted us children to believe that, because then we might be more particular about our thoughts. Anyway, those old Vicars Choral must have left behind them their thoughts. They were monks——"

"Secular clergy."

"They had taken vows of celibacy."

"Necessarily."

"They had renounced earthly joys."

"I happen to know that they did themselves passably well in their refectory."

"They prayed and fasted. Even at mealtimes one of them read aloud to the others. But my point is that the original spirit of the place lingers on. It affects young people; it affected me. It affected Felicity, for she told me so; and I'm sure it's affecting you."

"For good or ill, Judy?"

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"Perhaps for both. If there are tentacles——"

"What a word!"

"You find a better. Have any old persons left the Walk. They can't leave it till they die. But the young people. You made us laugh eighteen months ago, telling us about the Sumshion girls. When the war broke out every girl bolted——"

"To do their bit——"

"Some—not all. Bessie Custard skipped off the instant she was free. So did Willie Hiles."

"Tearing themselves loose from *tentacles*——?"

"Yes"

"If your children spoke of your arms as tentacles, you wouldn't like it."

"You can't mean that you feel for the Walk as my children feel for me. If so, matters are worse than I supposed. John was saying only the other night that you were between the devil and the deep sea——"

"Can't he express himself more originally than that?"

Judy began to laugh. She knew all about Ann Mary Hiles and the Sumshion girls; she knew that she herself had little or nothing in common with the minnows of the Walk; and she knew, none better, the depth of the gulf between them and the Tritons of the Close.

"I laugh, because I feel like crying. You are—now what is the word I want? What happens to a man when he's put ashore on a desert island?"

"Marooned?"

"That's it—marooned. I should be marooned if I went back to the Walk *now*. Your right place ought to be in the Precincts, not in the Walk. I mean socially."

"Rubbish!"

"I said ought to be! Being a verger, you can't hob-nob with a daughter of a minor canon, and you don't want to hob-nob with Nellie Sumshion or girls like her."

He smiled absently.

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"You haven't been listening——!"

"Oh, yes; but—you spoke of Bessie Custard; and I had something to tell you about her."

He mentioned the incident of the wreath, provoking Judith to tell him of another incident.

"You say this wreath must have cost a lot of money?" she asked.

"A fiver, at least."

"Bessie may have married a rich man. I can give you a tit for your tat. Months ago I thought I saw Bessie in a box at some theatre with two men, real swells. She was laughing and chattering, perfectly at her ease, and beautifully dressed."

"Alf Kerridge thought that he saw her here in London in a smart car."

"Bessie may have a double?"

"Quite."

"Still, after hearing about this wreath, I believe it was Bessie. The woman I saw had Bessie's gestures. Probably you never noticed them, little restless flicking of the hands, and an odd lift of one eyebrow."

"Yes; I—I remember."

"Has Willie Hiles come back?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking of some dirty gossip to which I paid no attention. You were in France at the time; you never heard it. Most likely it was just coincidence that Willie left the Walk when she did; but half the old women—not our mother nor Mrs. Vye—crawled about like snakes saying that Willie had got poor Bessie into trouble——" she broke off, arrested by Enoch's face, so savagely set that she exclaimed: "Enie! What's the matter? You look murderous——"

His face relaxed.

"Did I? Perhaps I want to tear the lying tongues of those hags out of their throats." He hesitated, and then said lightly: "Stupid to get hot about it, but long

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ago I resented the attitude of the Walk towards Bessie Custard ; I—I was sorry for her. Willie's leaving Fountains had nothing to do with Bessie. From something she let drop I fancy she had taken his measure and—and—er—*disliked* the fellow as much as I did. From something else which came to my ears, I'm sure that I can explain Bessie's going. She had heard this gossip ; she knew what the old cats said about her ; and—this is the big thing—she had learned something about her mother's people. I believe she went to them. And I daresay that she vanished, as you suggested at the time, leaving no trace, because she wanted to begin again, to cut loose from a hateful past."

"That is the charitable view to take, Enie."

He nodded and changed the subject.

5

Willie Hiles had not returned to the Walk, but the Walk learned, half-incredulously, that he was now a bagman, well-paid by one of the new motor car companies. Now and again Enoch heard of Willie from Alf, who knew more about others' business than he did of his own. For Felicity's sake, Enoch had remained on friendly terms with Alf, and indeed, if you were with the fellow, it was impossible to resist his friendliness and hospitality. Once a fortnight, on alternate Sundays, Enoch dined with the Kerridges.

Dined, if you please.

Mrs. Vye tossed her head at the mention of late dinner. That, if you like, was apeing the gentry and asking for trouble from your own class, who despised you if you had the impudence to pretend to be better than your betters. However, Felicity laughed at her mother, and trotted gaily beside Alf, certain that her husband had a sense of direction.

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By this time Enoch was equally sure that Alf's sense of mis-direction was luring him into wine vaults and bar parlours, spiritual homes where—so he explained to his wife and Enoch—he did business, and where, alas, business did him.

Thinking that it might amuse Felicity, Enoch repeated what Judith had said about "tentacles." He was surprised to find that she shared his sister's views and was able to express her own.

"I believe," she said, "that an old rule about women not being allowed inside the Walk affected us. Nunkle calls it a ban. Those old Vicars put up a notice: 'Women not allowed in our Precincts' I don't believe women wanted to go near dirty, greasy old men, who never washed. Pah! Then, in Elizabeth's time, when the singing men married, they bullied their wives, and kept them in subjection; and up to our time the men in the Walk had it their own way; and the women just had to knuckle under, 'cos the men said that they'd Scriptural authority, and all the Levites in Levites' Row used that. My! How shocked you looked when I told you that I found the Walk dull, just as Judith did. And you thought then, and may be you think now, that we two were exceptions. But every girl in the Walk thought as I did, only she didn't dare to say so. And to-day, those Sumshion girls are shouting out what we and all the women before us had to bottle up. *Have you got it?*"

"Clever Fee!"

"You don't think I'm clever. But I feel as Judith does about you. I—I wish you weren't a verger; I wish you didn't live in that cramping old Walk; and I wish, more than anything else——" she paused.

"What?"

"I shan't tell you."

"Aren't we friends?"

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She gave him her hand so ingenuously that he wanted to kiss it.

"Oh, well, I was going to say that I wish you had a jolly little wife, who would lark about with you as I lark about with Alf."

"I wish I had."

6

The coal strike of 1921 hardly affected Fountains, but it affected Enoch, because he liked to read both sides of any question. So did the Dean, whose failing health caused Enoch anxiety. The Dean and Arthur Kerridge might go swiftly, inasmuch as each suffered from a "tired" heart. Nunkle chuckled when he talked about this infirmity. In 1920, Drake was done to death before Nunkle's eyes. The appalling thing happened just outside the Walk. Drake—now an octogenarian—was sitting, as was his wont, surveying the Chapter House, on the road, but close to the sidewalk. A car, with three girls in it and a young man at the wheel approached slowly. The car could have been brought to a full stop within a yard. Nunkle supposed—and no doubt Drake supposed—that visitors were about to pull up, get out, and have a look at the Walk. At the last moment Nunkle yelled a warning. . . . The driver took no notice. He must have seen the dog. Deliberately, so it seemed to poor Nunkle, he drove on and into Drake. Blind fury possessed Nunkle. He admitted afterwards that he felt homicidal, that he had made up his mind to strike the driver with his stick. But at that moment Drake gave a yelp and sped through the arch of the Gate House and up the sharp incline of the Walk. Nunkle sped after him. Half way up, Drake turned, shot a piteous glance at his master, and dropped dead. Nunkle picked him up and carried him into the house. He knew that the dog was

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dead ; and half an hour later the local vet found that the heart had been crushed although the limbs had escaped injury. The man who drove the car, and the three heartless hussies with him, made no enquiries. Two or three children who witnessed the murder said that they drove off as if nothing had occurred.

Nunkle nearly died that afternoon. Next day, when Enoch was alone with him, he was philosophical about Drake and his own narrow escape.

"He was very old ; he had had his day, a good day. If I had died too, my boy, you could have buried us in the same grave, and inscribed as our epitaph—*Better Dead*. It is better to die before we can read in the faces of our friends their conviction that we have lingered too long."

When the junior verger repeated this to the Dean he said calmly :

"I understand ; I feel as Kerridge does. I have no wish to live after my work is done ; and it is, unmistakably, nearly done."

The strike affected Enoch, because he had accepted too thoughtlessly the assurance of Mr. Lloyd George that England was about to be transformed into Jerusalem the Golden, or Utopia, or Tom Tiddler's Ground—in the Wizard's words, a Home for Heroes.

It was now made manifest that the fatal mistake of not conscripting labour had hung a millstone of debt about the country. The Dean was of opinion that the ill-gotten wealth of the profiteers was a greater menace to the happiness of the proletariat than the poverty which invariably succeeds dislocation of industry. Enoch had again taken up clerical work for the Dean. But now, with failing energies, the wise old man bowed his head beneath the burden of years. And so, instead of pacing up and down the library, dictating as he walked and paused to select the right but elusive word, he would sit down in his chair and talk so delightfully

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that Enoch wondered what he would do when this kind friend passed away. He began to realise how dependent he was upon two old men, and what an influence they had exercised over him. Much of the Dean's talk dwelt upon the materialism of the younger generation, their lack of faith, their lack of enthusiasm, and the creeping paralysis which seemed to have assailed the Church. Nevertheless he predicted that there would be a quickening of the spirit similar to that which had taken place after the Napoleonic wars.

Every day, when Enoch took leave of him, he wondered whether he had heard his clear incisive tones for the last time.

7

Alf—so Enoch perceived—was drifting away from his wife. He still loved her but he had ceased to be “in love” with her, a distinction more obvious to women than men. Alf was such an unabashed, genial offender that even those who detected him in his offences could not help grinning at him. There are men in every community who disarm criticism. Alf was capable of making love to another woman under his wife's nose, and then saying to Enoch in Felicity's presence: “Fee taught me to appreciate dear little faces and dear little ways, but I tell the pet that what is best in me always has been and always will be faithful to her.” The French have a word which describes Mr. Alfred Kerridge—*impayable*, not adequately translated as “inimitable”.

Up to the end of 1921, and for a short time afterwards, he prospered, because farmers had prospered. He did a thumping local business, and travellers commended far and wide the good creature comforts of The Open Arms. Business instincts had not been at fault. Supply created demand. Had he stuck to the

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trade he understood, he might have made pounds where his father made shillings, despite too generous expenditure over improvements. Unhappily for him (and Felicity) he had the get-rich-quick complex and such confidence in his wits that he was not content with an innkeeper's profit. He began to speculate on the Stock Exchange. He was successful at first, making money over Rubbers and Oils. Felicity believed that she had married a Napoleon of Finance. In his transactions on the Turf he was not so fortunate. The innkeeper's slogan of keeping spirits up by pouring spirits down does not apply to Boniface himself.

Alf began to put on weight.

Felicity began to lose it.

Enoch surveyed the pair with troubled eyes. It occurred to him that a baby might engage Fee's attention and brighten dull hours when Alf was absent from home. He shrank from speaking to a young woman upon such a delicate theme, but Mrs. Vye egged him on to do it.

"She'll take it from you, Enie; she won't take it from me. She knows what I think. Why, long ago, years before she married, she aired her notions about babies and made me blush for her. You won't make her blush. And if I was you, I'd beat no bushes. Tell her straight that a child makes up to most women for the loss of a husband. Alf might die; and then she'd be left alone in her blacks."

"I—I don't believe I could talk to Fee about a baby unless it was crowing in her arms."

"You have a go at it. Here—I have it. Next time you're alone with her, give her a little shake, and say bang out: 'Now, Fee, I want a godson; and I'm tired of waiting. You hurry up, like a dear good girl, an' get on with it.' That's such a nice opener."

Mrs. Vye had her way with him.

Soon afterwards, opportunity presented itself. Alf

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escaped sudden death by a miracle. Negotiating an awkward corner too fast, his car skidded, and turned turtle. Hearing of the accident, Enoch hastened to make enquiries, and found Alf in bed (suffering from slight concussion) and Felicity in tears. Alf was able to say: "You take the old bird into my parlour. Give him a spot of port, and take one yourself."

Felicity gave Enoch his cue.

"He might be dead. Doctor says he ought to be dead. You drink your port; and I'll go back to him."

"He'll talk if you do. He'll doze off if you stay here with me."

"Yes; you're right; I will. I know I'm silly, but I keep on seeing him dead."

"Isn't it time you took out a form of insurance?"

"Enie—! What a beastly thing to say."

"I said *form*; and the form I had in mind was in a bassinette. Can't you make arrangements, as—as I have—er—indicated, to provide against loss?"

Fee began to giggle.

"If you aren't a case—! Well, you've made me laugh. Form of insurance! Will you promise to push the pram?"

"Yes; but I'm serious."

"You haven't said this to make me laugh?"

"No."

"Then I'll be serious too. If you were my husband and I had a baby, you'd behave exactly like a bird. Birds are such faithful dears. Yes; you'd hop about picking up worms for me, and all that. But Alf is so different. He'd hop off. Are you such an old silly as to think that I haven't talked this over with Alf scores of times? Of course I have. He'd hate to see me losing my figure; he'd hate to see me frightened, as I should be, and he'd hate the baby, when it came, if it interfered with our little jaunts together."

Enoch was tempted to say: "The damned selfish

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dog ! ” Instead, he muttered feebly : “ I—I beg your pardon. I—I—I’ve made a fool of myself.”

“ No, you haven’t. It was sweet of you, being you, and being such a prim old darling, to suggest this—er— ” she imitated him capitally, “ form of insurance, but I can’t take it out—yet.”

“ Perhaps not,” said Enoch.

8

He drank his port and went his way. Felicity sat on by herself, glancing at the familiar objects in her husband’s room, sporting prints, a stuffed pike, a bag of golf clubs, and a tennis racket in its press. He had so much to interest and amuse him. If she had been killed that afternoon, would he have missed her much ? Dismissing such thoughts as silly and unprofitable, she began to consider Enoch, half-whimsically, as the friend of the family, Enoch whom she might have married, whom she would have married had he not been Abel Saint’s son. Well, Enie would have been good to her. tender and true, but now, at this very moment, she would be sitting in a small, darkish, rather fusty little sitting-room with a baby on her knee, and another upstairs, and another, quite possibly, coming—— ! She would have had no fun, no larking about to dances, whist-drives, race-meetings and shows. . . .

“ Why couldn’t Enie, dear old fellow, be more like Alf ? Why couldn’t Alf be more like Enie ?

She sighed, stood up, and crossed to the chimney piece, peering at herself in a Georgian mirror. She could detect no lines about eyes, brow, or mouth ; her skin was clear, smooth of texture, and still innocent of make-up ; her lips laughed at lip-stick. No woman with babies could look as young and pretty as she did. When she smiled, the dimple showed itself in her left

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cheek. Babies coveted dimples, stealing them from their mothers ; babies knocked out teeth ; babies were such exacting little toads——

And yet, if Alf were lying dead upstairs, if the lid of the coffin had just been screwed down, and if she knew that never, never would she see his laughing face again, why then, if there was a little Alf to whom she could turn, it would not be so terrible. Yes, Enie was right about that.

Again—why wasn't Alf more like Enie ?

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Dean Passes

I

NUNKLE declared that he would never buy another dog till he had slain with his own hand the young man who had done Drake to death and scourged the three misbegotten accessories to the murder. This was Nunkle's way of emphasising "never." Enoch waited for a few months, and then bought a youthful Aberdonian (over distemper) whom he presented to Nunkle with misgiving tempered by the thought that he would keep the tyke himself if Nunkle refused to accept him.

Nunkle was much moved.

"You are a good boy, too good a boy! I accept the wee dog on condition that he has a home with you when I leave the Walk. He looks a wicked little sinner. That's why my fancy strays to these black-avised terriers. They look such scamps, and they behave like gentlemen. 'I am a gentleman, and by my birth companion for a king; a king's no more.' " The basket belonging to Francis III was pulled out of a cupboard; and Francis IV lay down in it without more ado and went fast asleep.

"Dogs are great educators," observed Nunkle. "My dogs taught me to be philosophical."

"If they lived longer——"

"Those whom the gods love die young. That's why parrots live to be a hundred. The gods hate parrots."

"Weren't you philosophical as a young man, Nunkle?"

"I was an excitable, emotional, sentimental young

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ass. A musician, and I dare to call myself that, gets as easily out of tune as a fiddle. *Fit as a fiddle* is a ridiculous tag. A fiddle is never fit for ten minutes together. I was a stringed instrument, and the son of a licensed victualler——! Comic touch that. A throw-back. Neither my father nor mother were musical. I sang in the choir just as you did. Our Precentor was good to me——”

“As you were to me, Nunkle.”

“He had me taught to play the organ. And——”

He paused, half-smiling, half-frowning.

“Yes?”

“Encouraged what the Dean has encouraged in you—book-worming.”

“Well?”

“I was educated above my station. I became something of an intellectual snob, of all forms of snobbery the most unpardonable. If book-learning were wisdom, which it isn't, the more one read the more tolerant one would be of ignorance and inexperience.”

Again he paused to fill his pipe, staring at Enoch.

“It was before the war, wasn't it, that I told you I would tell you my story one day?”

“Yes.”

“You had asked me why I was down on women; and I thought at the time that you were too young to be harried and distressed by my experience. How old are you?”

“Nearly twenty-nine.”

“M'm. I now ask myself is my story worth telling.”

“I'm sure it is.”

“So commonplace. I was the victim of my upbringing here in the Precincts. My brother Alfred, brought up outside the Precincts, would have behaved differently. Probably you will understand my story because you are a Levite of Levites' Row just as I was,

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although at the time I had not become a Collegian. I fell in love with a young lady who thought it a lark to have an affair with a romantic boy. I was playing with fire; she wasn't. You can think of me as an ugly Romeo; but you mustn't think of her as Juliet. I felt that I was composing and playing a Wedding March; she was practising five-finger exercises. It came to the ears of her father, one of our minor canons, that I was meeting his daughter on the sly. He sent for me. You can guess what he said, and how he ground me to powder under his gentlemanly heel. I deserved what I got, but, mind you, she had sworn to stick to me through thick and thin; and I believed, being a fool, that the world was my oyster; so I defied him. Then he sent for her. Poor little thing! She came in white and trembling, but able—to my amazement—to wag a nimble tongue. *She lied*—! She lied so resourcefully that the situation was saved for her. The comic side to it, which I did not appreciate at the time, was that the father not only called me a liar, but made me one. I had to deny all that I had just said. What else could I do? He gibbeted me, holding me up to scorn as a contemptible fellow who boasts of favours which have never been accorded, who poses as a conqueror before he has drawn his sword. After, metaphorically, kicking me out of his house, he told me that for his daughter's sake, nothing should be said. The girl was sent abroad; he accepted a living in the north; I never saw either of them again——”

“Rough on you, Nunkle.”

“I ought to have laughed. Instead I sulked. That worthless little wench had torn to tatters my ideal of maidenhood. I remember thinking that Sapphira dropped dead not because she lied but because she was found out. So much for Number One. Number Two was below me socially. Both were liars. Bad luck

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to strike two liars in succession! Enoch—history repeated itself with a difference. The mother asked me to make an honest woman of her daughter by marrying her within the month. I was palsied. I had believed Number Two to be good as gold; I had treated her reverentially! When I tried to make this plain the mother sent for the girl, who swore that I was the father of her unborn child——!”

“What did you do?”

“I scurried to my old friend, the Precentor, who believed me when I swore that I was blameless. He sent for the girl, and put her through a sort of Third Degree. She owned up to the truth. In those days the Close was omnipotent. Pressure was brought to bear. The girl married her secret lover and left Fountains. And here I am—a soured old bachelor.”

“Not very soured,” said Enoch.

“The moral is, try, try and try again. But, so far as I know, you have not tried at all. Why?”

Then Enoch told his story.

2

Nunkle listened sympathetically, smoking his pipe, and nodding his head, but he supposed that his young friend's affair with Bessie had been innocent, which provoked the comment:

“You had a providential escape from that Custard girl.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I feel it. I wish you had married Fee.”

“I shouldn't have made her happy. She wants more than I could give her. I'm content to be her friend.”

“I could leave the Walk without regret if I could see you settled.”

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"I am settled."

"Have you ever considered that grievous word—atrophy? Deliberately I atrophied one side of myself. I know it now; I didn't know it then. I feel a certain responsibility about you, Enoch. Perhaps you ought to leave the Walk, snug harbourage, but a back-water. Both the Dean and I underestimated your recuperative powers. Would you have taken on your father's job if you had not had that malaria?"

"I—I don't know."

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

"What else could I do?"

"Carry your pigs to a bigger market."

"My pigs——? Hardly prize winners. Think of the men now unemployed? And my mother is so self-effacing that perhaps you have forgotten her?"

Nunkle attacked his harmonium. To Enoch's amusement the "Voice that breathed o'er Eden" indicated the trend of the organist's thoughts. Lifting his hands from the keys, he swung round upon the stool.

"I'd like to be playing that over you and a jolly young woman. Listen!"

A sound suggesting the keening of a banshee filled the room.

"What's that, Nunkle?"

"Eve wailing for a mate."

Francis IV woke up, and began to yap furiously.

"He disapproved," said Enoch.

"If he disapproved, he would growl."

"But, Nunkle, isn't this a case of find the girl?"

"To-day, Enoch," replied Nunkle sententiously, "the girl makes it her business to find the man."

When Alf was up and about again, unchastened by an intimidating accident, he began to wander farther afield, pleading important business as an excuse for

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leaving his wife alone. Being Alf, he got what he would have called a double twist on that excuse by pointing out to Felicity that she was able (and ought to be willing) to "run" The Open Arms whilst he was making (or losing) "big money" elsewhere. Felicity was neither able nor willing, but she made, prettily enough, a virtue of necessity and sent for Enoch when she found herself impotent to deal with pert chambermaids and extortionate tradesmen. Alf—again because he was Alf—approved of this. Had he ever heard the word he might have spoken of Enoch as epicene. In his own uproarious way he made it plain to his wife that he regarded most of his fellow-townsmen as pawns to be moved here and there at his bidding.

"Old Enie is our pal. You can use him. He's much sharper than he looks, although a reactionary dog. He eats out of your hand——"

"He doesn't"

"He might try to squeeze it."

"That's a hateful thing to say."

"Not at all. Your hand was made to be squeezed. Your own hubby can't resist squeezing it after all these years of married bliss. You see I trust old Enie and you—absolootly. Send for Enie. Whistle the old dog up! It's a kindness to him. He likes fetching and carrying for you, Bud."

"Silly name to call me. I wish you'd stop it."

"But you're still a bud. Wonderful how you keep your looks! Gosh! If I were Enie I'd make love to you."

"Yes; you would."

"You bet I would," he replied imperturbably; "but Enoch Saint is not Alf Kerridge. All the same——" he paused and began to chuckle.

"Why are you laughing?"

"I remembered something Enie said to me donkeys' years ago. Now—wait! What was it? It impressed

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me at the time. It was one of those queer, unexpected breaks of his. Breaks is not bad, eh? "

" I don't understand—— "

" Oh, yes, you do, sweetie. Enoch, when he gets out of himself—those were the very words he used—can be a hell of a fellow—— "

" What nonsense ! "

" Somebody told me, an officer too, that Enoch was far from behaving like a saint when he was soldiering. He got out of himself then. But that's hearsay. What he told me isn't ! "

" What did he tell you ? And," she paused, eyeing him half-resentfully, " I don't believe half the things you tell me." "

" What a lamb ! Course you don't. I'm proud of being one of the beloved liars of this town, but now I'm telling the truth. Enie confided to me that he felt at moments as if he could dash at anything or anybody." "

" We all feel like that sometimes." "

" You don't—— "

" Yes ; I do. Enie *did* dash at the Boches—and got the Military Medal." "

" Are you hinting that I didn't ? "

" No, but I—I mean that the war took it out of Enie—terribly. You were spared what he went through. Anyway, all boys talk a lot of tosh, because the child is father to the man." "

" That's a good 'un. Living with me has brightened you up. I love back-chat. Better a word than a blow, better a blow-out than a blow-up. You're next." "

But Felicity declined the challenge, not being able to compete with Alf in light badinage. He kissed her and bounced off.

Left too much alone, her thoughts recurred again and again to this brief conversation, which threw a

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fresh light on an old friend. Enoch had *dashed* at her. He had taken, it is true, time to do it. She recalled shy hesitations, awkward advances and retirements. And then, suddenly, when she least expected it, he had her in his arms.

If Alf knew about that——?

Being her father's and mother's daughter, being still a child of the Walk, she refused to think of Enoch as a lover, or even as a dasher. He was old Sober-sides, the staunch friend, a stickler for duty, a verger with a verge——!

Nevertheless, she told herself that no sister could love a brother more than she loved Enoch Saint.

3

In 1922, Unity Sibbick, Mrs. Vye's third daughter, came back to the Walk which she had left as a blooming bride some twelve years previously. She brought with her three children and moved into a vacant house. This was contrary to tradition and precedent, and—according to the gossips—an indication that the sacred College might degenerate into a poor-house. Mr. Sibbick had sung as a boy in the cathedral church choir. That fact, *plus* marriage to the senior verger's daughter, secured Unity's admission.

She was the same age as Enoch, passably good-looking, but burdened with a grievance. She had barely enough money to feed and clothe herself and her children. Mr. Sibbick had been a prosperous fish-monger. After his death Unity attempted to carry on his business. Having no business aptitudes, she came within an ace of bankruptcy. However, fortunately for her, a solicitor managed to dispose of the shop and its goodwill in time to save something for the widow and orphans.

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Felicity said to Enoch : " You'll be nice to Unity, won't you ? "

" I'm not a ladies' man, Fee."

" But you are. All the ladies love you And you're fond of dogs and children. Poor Unity feels so lonely. She must miss Eustace——"

Enoch grunted, recalling Eustace as a smug, smirking, the - mackerel - are - fresh - in - this - morning tradesman. He had joined up on the eve of conscription.

" Do you think she does ? " he asked. He could put such questions to Fee, wondering how she would answer them. The free and easy Alf had put an edge to her wits. And of late, deprived of her lord's genial company, she had become less of an echo.

" Of course she does."

" Missed but not regretted."

" That's very naughty of you."

" I often wonder what fishmongers do before they rejoin their families. Do they take a Turkish bath ? The smell of fish is so permeating."

" No worse than whisky."

Enoch cursed himself for a 'tactless ass. Whenever Fee flashed out, displaying what was so alien to her, cattishness, Enoch felt sorry for her. Was he a cad because he labelled as cads men like Alf and the late Eustace Sibbick ?

" Aren't you sorry for Unity ? "

" Because she's lost Eustace ? No."

" She's not thirty and her life is over."

Such remarks coming from the lady of his youthful dreams exasperated Enoch. What, he asked himself, were women after ? Since the war they had gained a liberty of action and speech which had been earned according to them—during the war. They had shortened their skirts and shingled their pates ; they did much as they pleased, and sensible men shrugged

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their shoulders and laughed. Unity was a healthy woman with three healthy children.

"I refuse to honour overdrafts on sympathy."

"How tiresome of you!"

"Nature's first law, self-preservation."

"You must admit that it's rather poisonous for poor Unity to come back to the Walk?"

"A month ago you were asking me to pull strings to get her back; you cajoled Nunkle; you bullied your father——"

"Oh, you pretend you don't understand; but you do. If Alf had been killed the other day; and if our business went to pot under my management, which it would, I might have to come back to the Walk, but I should hate it."

"I wonder whether you would."

"I know I should."

"But you're assuming that a woman knows what she wants; and the wisdom of the ages affirms that she doesn't."

"You'll make me ever so cross if you aren't careful."

And then she would smile so sweetly and so disconcertingly that Enoch felt a cantankerous beast. She had remained a child with a child's charm and variability of mood, still a creature of the passing moment. Why had Barrie made Peter Pan a boy? And why was he constrained to get a girl to play the part?

Enoch promised to be "nice" to Unity.

She failed to interest him; but he was beguiled by the children, jolly kids rampaging up and down the Walk, shrieking with laughter, full of life, imps of importunity! They "adored" him.

More repercussions.

Perhaps he welcomed their humanising influence. Insensibly they rejuvenated a man likely to become prematurely old.

The Dean Passes

4

1922 was not exactly an *annus mirabilis* for thoughtful persons concerned with the nation's future. The Dean talked to Enoch about Disarmament and International Security. Depression was deepening. One publicist spoke of Europe as a madhouse. Others prattled about economic regeneration. There was increasing unemployment in Fountains and all over the kingdom. Pedants and scholiasts predicted a *débâcle*: we had won the war and lost the peace.

Enoch was keenly interested in the problems that the Dean attempted to solve, but dismally conscious of the after-effects of the war upon himself. Although he had not said so to Felicity, he resented grumblings from those who had survived.

Meanwhile Unity's return to the Walk brought Felicity more often to it. When Enoch went home for his tea, he would see her darting from her mother's house to her sister's. Once more Mrs. Vye complained that Fee was not doing her duty.

"She won't have a baby, and she's turning into a gadabout, traipsing here and there all day——"

"Does it matter much so long as she's happy?"

"Happy folks aren't restless. Alf goes one way and she goes another."

Enoch, after a moment's hesitation, played a trump card.

"Anyway, Fee comes to you and her sister; she might go elsewhere."

"Oh dear, my dear, you are a comfort; and I can talk to you as if you were my own son. I'm beginning to hate Alf, and me a Christian woman. To go back to the baby business, I did have a notion after you spoke to Fee about it—and my! I hoped that a word in season from you, would sink in—where was I?"

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Yes," she lowered her voice, " I can say, to you, Enie, what I wouldn't say to Joe, 'cos Joe, good man though he is, never a better, and able to see a joke, although the dear Lord knows that this is no joke, well, Joe is—how shall I put it?—so old-fashioned in his ways of thinking. Now—I've clean forgotten what I wanted to tell you——"

" Something about the multiplication table."

" You never forget anything, but you're young; and my memory is not what it used to be, nor is Joe's. He carries a notebook, but men have so many pockets."

" What was your notion ? "

" Suppose, Enie, that Fee didn't want to be the mother of that man's children—— ? "

Enoch was so taken aback that he murmured : " Gosh ! " and then stared at Mrs. Vye after a mental flight to the Deanery. What would the Dean say to such a thought-provoking question ?

" That never entered your headpiece, did it ? "

" Never."

" Course not ; you're a man ; but you take it from me, Enoch Saint, that women like meself with good brains and experience, and, mind you, neither amounts to much without the other, have to think of these delicate matters."

" I dare say they think of them when it's too late, when they're grandmothers—— "

" You don't march wi' the times. Young girls shout to-day what their granmas dared not whisper. Well, you've cheered me up. 'Tis true that Fee comes to me and her sister, but what she gains on the swings—that's me and my cheerful disposition—she loses on the roundabouts, 'cos pore Unity is so whiny-piny. Fee is lucky to have me for a mother and you for a brother."

No more was said about the multiplication table.

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5

In August, 1923, upon a Sunday evening, the Vyes (including Felicity) and Enoch were drinking tea with Mrs. Saint. Fee—despite that pagan, Alf—seldom missed the Morning Service and as seldom attended Evensong. “Oncers,” according to Mrs Vye, had something in common with p.m. domestic workers. Each assumed perilous risks of scamping duties. Even “twicers” were not so reasonably assured of salvation as “thricers.”

Presently Felicity jumped up.

“Where are you off to?” asked Mrs. Vye.

“I’ve a lot to do over home, Mum.”

“I’ll be bound you have—and you don’t do it. Have you forgotten that in August we have Evensong at eight, and to-night the Dean is preaching? It will be quite like old times. Alf has got you into very heathenish ways.”

“Oh, all right! To please you——”

“To please me——! Whatever will Mrs. Saint think of you.”

What Mrs. Saint thought, she kept to herself, as she said in her quiet voice:

“The Dean has not preached for several weeks.”

“I do love to hear him,” Fee admitted. “And perhaps my ways are heathenish.”

Concerning these ways Felicity had time to reflect, listening to Nunkle playing the voluntary. His voluntaries, according to the Dean, were an invitation to thought and prayer, suasive and pervasive. For the most part they were his own compositions, although he liked to take a familiar theme from some master of church music and superimpose variations. His pianissimo passages were so remarkable that the Dean had once suggested that he might accompany a sermon or parts of it. Nunkle was willing to attempt this,

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and went a step further. If the organ could be thus used, why not enlist the services of the choir? But the Dean, greatly tempted, shrank from such a daring experiment. It smacked of the theatre. The word advertisement would be on many lips. When Nunkle said: "*You* could do it, Mr. Dean," the old man smiled, but he had a vision of a Charles Honeyman of a minor canon using such adjuncts to Divine Service as a "draw."

Felicity glanced at the faces about her. This was especially the Dean's congregation, the faithful of Fountains, middle-aged and old people who, presumably, regarded attendance as an act of allegiance to God, although it was too often a tribute to the eloquence of the Dean, and his great gift of exacting attention and interest. Few indeed dozed comfortably off when Dr. Dyson stood in the pulpit.

For some reason, inexplicable at the moment, Felicity felt strangely awed and distressingly sensible of heathenish ways. Because she was not too happy, she jerked herself away from the present, and drifted back to the past on the wavelets of Nunkle's music. She wondered what Nunkle was trying to say. After the roarings of Alf, these sublimated harmonies suggested the still small voice of conscience. The organ was talking to her. . . .

Evensong began. Felicity watched her father preceding the Dean to his stall. Joseph Vye ceased to be her father, he became the Dean's verger; the choirboys, naughty little scamps some of them, filed past demurely, puppies transmuted into puppets, part of a spectacular show. Felicity knew every surpliced man and boy, from the Dean down to the smallest urchin. What did all this mean to them? That she could ask herself such a question indicated how far she had strayed from the Walk, and yet, asking it, she felt again the domination of the Walk and its uncanny

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power over its children. Mrs. Vye, as she stood up, assumed an expression expressing what she felt, what she had always felt—approval, complacency, piety and serenity; she had identified herself with a splendid ritual; she had the air of a non-commissioned officer on parade at a military ceremony, such as the Trooping of the Colour. “Mum loves this,” thought Felicity, as Mrs. Vye sank upon her knees to offer up a prayer for the clergy. The children of Levites’ Row were told, long before they mastered the Catechism, that you prayed on entering the church for yourself, beseeching Omnipotence to bestow upon you grace and understanding. And then you knelt, when the clergy knelt, to pray that similar graces and benedictions might be bestowed upon them. After that, so the children were instructed, a golden link was established between church and state; and an interpenetrating spiritual essence flowed from one to the other.

On this occasion Felicity made up her mind to give undivided attention to the service. She wanted to understand, if she could, the less obvious appeal of what had appealed so tremendously to millions. The Second Lesson was read by the Dean. Difficult indeed to attend to that when he was at the lectern. She noticed, with an odd pang, how thin and white he was, how much older. But his voice had retained its quality.

The anthem followed.

Once more there was a boy in the choir with a lovely voice. His singing whirled Felicity back to the days when she listened, as a child of ten, to Enoch Saint, the wonder-boy who would walk home with her and tell her stories.

Before the last notes of the anthem had died away she had achieved detachment from herself as Alf’s wife. Once more she was a good little maid sitting beside her mother, holding her mother’s hand, serene

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in her conviction that she was under God's protection and in His temple.

The Dean ascended the pulpit and gave out his text :
Have fervent charity, for charity shall cover sins.

The preacher paused before he cited another text :
Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Felicity thrilled under the spell of the Dean's personality. His opening sentences were, as usual, colloquial, confidentially so, establishing intimacy. This was no rhetorical trick, but a habit. It put his listeners at ease ; it conveyed the assurance that the preacher was incapable of preaching over the heads of his congregation, that he would, if he could, descend from the pulpit and walk about among them, talking as he walked, as he did when he addressed children.

Another habit, endearing to the less intelligent, was his lucid explanation of words. He was a lover of words, a patient seekér of the right word. He began with the adjective " fervent," presenting it as ardent, glowing, and *fermenting*. Not only a source of light and heat, but generating other qualities. Charity, in its broadest and highest manifestation, was fervent in the generating sense, the undying ferment of the spirit. An indictment of indifference followed, the slow cooling off of love, death in life and death of life.

As he spoke the light in the chancel failed with the setting sun, but on each side of the preacher were candelabra with candles already lit. Electric light was used elsewhere ; but in the pulpit the old usage of wax candles prevailed, three on each side.

This indictment of indifference, as a precursor of spiritual death, was emphasised by the darkness of the Choir and the strongly illuminated face of the preacher.

" Do you feel as I do," asked the Dean, " that the dying day, with the shadows deepening about us, is symbolical of chill and dismal indifference ? Sitting here in this encircling gloom do you realise that

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unenlightened negligence of spiritual things is the unpardonable sin which charity cannot cover because it is the sin against the Holy Ghost? And do you agree with me that negation of God as the Universal Mind is to-day excusing itself, justifying itself, and glorifying itself on the specious plea that knowledge informs it? That knowledge, I warn you solemnly, is the knowledge that puffeth up, the knowledge that boasts of its independence of the spirit, a knowledge relying upon the test-tube, the crucible and the microscope. In regard to material things I admit that this knowledge is almost omniscient; and I say 'almost' because within the past ten years principles held to be fixed as the stars have been rejected by Science and derided."

He spoke in tones so subdued and so free from rancour that his listeners hung upon his words as if he were indeed a seer. Many present were poignantly aware of a premonition that the speaker was addressing them for the last time. Those who loved him best feared that he might be overtaxing his strength. At the Choir gate stood Enoch. He knew that the sands were running out.

The Dean dealt last with the charity that edifies. To edify—so he explained—means to build; edification is a building-up, a process not of instruction but of construction.

Enoch guessed what would follow; but he was not prepared for the feeling which informed every phrase, when the Dean spoke of the love that had raised up the cathedral church, the love that endured in stone.

"I am aware," he said, "that when I came to you more than thirty years ago this charity that builds well-nigh imperishable monuments to itself, this love which is about us to-night, this austere beauty, took possession of me and became part of myself. I had then too much of the knowledge that puffeth up,

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although my scholarship, such as it was, had been nourished and amplified by the very men who dedicated their energies and their lives to the service of God. But scholarship is negligible unless it is applied, in the sense that a science is applied, beneficently. If it preens itself upon a culture denied to the many, if it lives on itself, if it exalts a man above his fellows, why then it is a disability and a hindrance. I admit to you frankly that my love for our cathedral church was edified by my scholarship, by my specialised knowledge of Gothic Architecture. Then I turned from the stones to the men who had so truly laid them. And now I could use my scholarship aright, and I began to apprehend the Divine love and the Divine Purpose that must have inspired those builders who builded better than they knew, who cared so little for personal fame that many of their names are unknown to us. And now, to-day, when my tenure of mortal life is so frail, it may well be that I discern more clearly the greater things of the spirit, and I know that these alone are imperishable.

"I commend to you the love that is fervent, the love that never waxes cold, the love that leavens life and makes it worth living. You can find it in the heart of a child, or in the heart of age. Between these extremes are its myriad manifestations, but as it begins so let it end—in purity and peace—selfless at first and selfless at last, the acid test of its divinity——"

He descended from the pulpit, and pronounced the benediction standing erect in front of the high altar. Then he turned and knelt. The congregation knelt with him.

He had delivered his last message to his people; and—whether designedly or not—it was a message of love.

Kneeling before that altar, beneath which so long ago a great bishop had been buried, the Dean of Fountains died.

Book Three

*Well, honour is the subject of my story,
I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life ; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.*



The Cathedral

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
A Traveller Returns

I

NUNKLE died a month after the Dean's funeral. The two men who succeeded were very different from their predecessors both in character and disposition. The organist was a clever, slightly supercilious gentleman who refused to live in the Walk. His wife, with money of her own, aspired to social recognition from the Close, but gave offence to many ladies by wearing frocks so up-to-date (and so up to and over her knees) that the wife of an archdeacon condemned them as "meretricious."

Dr. Marsack, the new Dean, a middle-aged, capable, hard-working, ex-schoolmaster, was *persona grata* to the Labour Government, and one of their first ecclesiastical appointments. No less a personage than a Cabinet Minister predicted that Dr. Marsack would see to it that no more grass grew in the streets of Fountains. Local gossip added that if one blade escaped his hoe, Mrs. Marsack would uproot it quick as a cat could blink her eye. There were two Misses Marsack, irreclaimable highbrows, and a son still at Oxford reported to be a prig.

Unhappily Enoch incurred the Dean's displeasure. The Bishop, when he heard the story, felt sorry for both men. Enoch was showing the cathedral church to some visitors. The Dean, passing through the Lady Chapel, recognised a lady whom he knew. Whereupon he took charge of the party as *cicerone*. Afterwards Joseph Vye swore by the bones of King Ina that he had said to Dr. Marsack: "What Enoch

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Saint does not know about Early English in our church is not worth knowing": this information may have slipped into one ear and out of the other. It is certain that the Dean had dipped, too hastily perhaps, into a couple of text-books dealing with Fountains architecture; and he prided himself upon a retentive memory.

Acting as guide, he maintained that there was no trace of Norman work in a thirteenth and fourteenth century building. King Ina's first church had been built of wood and demolished to make way for a stone structure. Had this second church been razed to the ground? The earlier authorities contended that it had. Anyway, the Dean's statement would have been accepted by ninety-nine visitors out of every hundred. The hundredth man, a famous architect, happened to have joined the Dean's party; and he had read the late Dean's *Anecdotal History*, and recalled what Dr. Dyson had said in his preface about the two Saints. This gentleman ventured to say politely that he had reason to believe that traces of Norman work could be found in the cathedral church if an expert looked for them behind superimposed decoration in the South Transept. The Dean, slightly piqued (and unaware that an expert was speaking), stuck to his guns, whereupon the visitor, already much impressed by Enoch's previous remarks, turned to him, and said pleasantly:

"You are Mr. Enoch Saint, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Then you can show me where these Norman bits are hidden."

"Saint can't show you, my dear sir, what isn't here."

There was a pause. Enoch held his tongue; the Dean, with less discretion, persisted that he had authority behind him.

"Whose authority, Mr. Dean?"

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Dr. Marsack mentioned two names.

"Prehistoric—those fellows. Dr. Dyson had the last and best word. Mr. Saint here can tell us what he said."

"Was his word the best?" asked the Dean.

Enoch, most reluctantly, repeated what the late Dean had said; and this led to an enlightening discussion between a real authority and a junior verger, in which—much to the amusement of the ladies of the party—Dr. Marsack took no part. Finally he turned to the visitor and said coldly:

"May I ask to whom I have the honour of listening?"

"Of course you can. I'm Claud Font."

"You are Sir Claud Font?"

"Yes."

"Then I apologise for obtruding my views."

Unhappily again Claud Font was a most outspoken person. He laughed genially.

"Not another word, Mr. Dean. I ought to have introduced myself. You are a high dignitary of the Church, I'm an architect. But your verger knows much more than I do about this splendid building."

And that—as the gossips observed—"tore it."

2

The Bishop, a kindly man, regretted this incident, which, had it happened to himself, would have provoked chucklings. He chuckled when he showed to young ladies a half-crown bestowed upon him for services as guide by some tourist from overseas who may have thought that vergers wore gaiters. My lord prized this half-crown as money honestly earned, and told the young ladies that, had it been sixpence, he would have hung the coin from his watch-chain. An Arch-deacon, commenting upon both affairs, observed that

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his lordship was sure of his position and that Dr. Marsack was not, a sound summing-up. The new Dean was too new for Fountains ; and yet, as Mrs. Vye pointed out, he wanted it both ways : he coveted the love and respect inspired by his predecessor, and he had to justify his appointment as a "live wire."

So far as he and Enoch were concerned this passage at arms might have been forgotten ; but the Dean, over zealous in the discharge of decanal duties, learned with sorrow (so he told Mrs. Marsack) that the junior verger was a constant visitor at an ancient tavern outside Fountains, significantly named The Open Arms. An ex-schoolmaster, accustomed to deal with naughty boys, jumped to the conclusion that Enoch loved his glass. However, had he known the truth, he might have been more grieved to learn that a Levite was the intimate friend of a publican's wife, an attractive young woman said to be neglected by her husband——!

He sent for Enoch.

In the interview that followed, which took place in the library where Enoch had spent such happy hours, Dr. Marsack suffered defeat, his word. "He defeated me," he told his wife and family, an admission repeated with embellishments outside the Deanery. Enoch's account of a Pyrrhic victory went no farther than his mother.

"Why did the Dean send for you?" she asked. "Has he work to offer?"

"No. Advice."

"Advice?"

"He cited Agag. I am enjoined to mind my step. He takes me for a toss-pot, a frequenter of bar-parlours, a friend of publicans——"

"Gracious!"

"Anything but that. I expected him to fish out a cane and invite me to bend over."

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"And you sit there smiling——! What next?"

"I kept my head; he lost his."

"But what did you say?"

"Nothing; I bowed my head beneath the rod."

'Enie, are you teasing me?"

"Mother, I wonder if you know what a weapon silence is. I remember your using it on me and father." Mrs. Saint smiled. "I could have answered the Dean; but it was difficult to do so, too difficult for me. I loathe excuses. On the other hand, had I suggested that he was overstepping his privileges as my chief, he might have accused me of impertinence. I was tempted to hand in my resignation, but that would have broken your heart—and mine. And then, suddenly, I recalled your silence when I had jabbered out as a boy some stupid grievance. Because so often you said nothing, not one word, I would lie awake wondering what you were thinking; and I guessed that you must be thinking of me as a silly ass. Perhaps—I don't know—the Dean will wonder what I think of his unwarranted and—and not-likely-to-be-repeated warning. You see he expected some sort of answer; and then, being a schoolmaster, he would have dealt with my answer. Instead, silence provoked him to say more than he intended. He rated me. Finally, he asked querulously why I held my tongue?"

"You had to speak then?"

"As you say; I had to speak then."

"Tell me exactly what you said."

"I said, 'Mr. Dean, when I came back from the war, I was broken in health, but had held for more than two years His Majesty's commission. Here, in this room, Dr. Dyson paid me a compliment which was a greater honour to me than my medals. He offered me the junior vergership without imposing conditions or warnings. He had known me all my life; he trusted me. If he were here, standing in your place, he, I

think, would commend my silence. If you, the head of the Chapter, do not trust me, you can discharge me."

"You said that?"

"Word for word."

"Then, if he is the man I take him to be, you have made an enemy for life."

Enoch shrugged his shoulders.

3

In 1925, Mrs. Saint passed away in her sleep. After the funeral Enoch sat alone in the panelled parlour and attempted readjustments. His mother had been a tremendous restraining influence in his life. This room, so he reflected, was like her; or was she, blessed soul, like it? A problem impossible to solve. Here, after her marriage, she had been content to pass her days, engaged in endless ministrations or quietly reading. She had demanded little from life; and that little had been bestowed upon her. Towards the end she had wanted to go, terrified lest she might become an encumbrance dependent on others. Her passing had been wonderful, so easy, so free from pain, and she was so sure of what awaited her on the Other Side—her husband, some of the children she had taught, and a sister who had died forty years ago. . . .

Enoch wondered how much of his mother was in him? Since the death of Nunkle and the Dean, he too had come to regard this parlour as a haven where he was serenely conscious of well-being. A verger's hours are long; he is too much on his feet; even a younger and stronger man might have found it difficult to resist the lure of an armchair. During the day he had to talk; it was an agreeable change to be silent.

Presently Judith joined him. She had been upstairs,

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busy with her mother's few belongings. She sat near her brother and laid her hand upon his.

"I wish you could come and live with us," she whispered, half-meaning it.

"You are prepared to support me, Judy?"

"I'm unhappy about you."

"You needn't be."

"You may turn into a hermit. I always think of hermits as selfish old men concerned with the salvation of their own souls. Were such souls worth saving?"

"My work brings me into hourly contact with all the world and his wife."

"Ships that pass in the night."

"I have Drake. I must fetch him."

Drake had been left with Unity's children till the funeral was over. Drake had been bequeathed to Enoch. And with him was left the sum of one hundred pounds (which Enoch regarded as a Sustenance Fund), and Nunkle's piano.

"Don't go yet, or I shall be jealous. I can see you in your hermit's cell, talking to Drake, playing the piano, and growing a beard."

"Not yet."

"Getting more and more careless about your appearance. Mrs. Vye offers to board you."

"I shall board myself. I have bespoken the services of an old dear who——"

"—will have you under her thumb."

"Drake will protect me."

Judith sighed, recognising in her brother an obstinate streak (inherited from their father) of which she had her share. Whilst they were talking Mrs. Vye came in "in her blacks." With portentous solemnity she kissed Enoch and Judith and sat down upon the most uncomfortable chair, bolt upright, dissembling her joy in funerals. Now and again she dabbed at her eyes and sniffed.

"Everything," she remarked, "went off just as I should have wished if I had been in the coffin myself. I passed the remark to Mr. Vye that it would be my turn next. He seemed miffed; and I asked him if he grudged me my rest. Some way he don't get the satisfaction that I do out o' funerals. But I told him that as we near the Psalmist's span, an' I was sixty-two last birthday, we must, if we're Christians, look upon the Great Change as a change for the better. Did you read, Enie, what I wrote upon the card attached to my wreath?"

"Yes."

"Did you, Judith?"

"N-no."

"I do hope that the young man from the *Western Banner* didn't miss it. I wrote: 'Lily is in God's Garden.' And when your father died I wrote: 'He has gone Home.' I'm not one to talk about sacred things; sort o' cheapens 'em, I say, but when we take off our blacks it is fitting and proper to lay aside vain lamentations. We must believe, if we believe anything, that our dear ones are with the Lord, and I say that calls for inward rejoicing, but when I said as much to Mr. Vye not half an hour ago, he asked if I was looking forward to burying him, and added, which I wouldn't repeat to anybody but you two dear children, that he didn't fancy the idea of me dancing on his grave——"

"Will you have a glass of sherry, Auntie?"

"Oh, dear, my dear, I had one before the funeral and a slice o' Dundee cake, although rich cake disagrees with me, an' sherry wine is not the best thing for my eczemy. I would like a cup o' tea presently. I came in, Enie, to tell you how heartily welcome you are, and always will be, to anything I've got. And I want to say, before your dear sister, that I'm not grieving for the dear good soul who is with her heavenly Father, but for you, my pore boy, left all alone. Fee is crying

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her eyes out, looks a sight ! And it's on your account, Enie, 'cos she told me so."

Judith shot a glance at her brother, whose face was impassive. She believed, like everybody else, that Enoch's feelings for Felicity were fraternal ; but she wondered if Felicity's feelings for him were sisterly. Impotent anger possessed her when she thought of Fee as Alf's wife. At this moment, despite the sanctifying reactions of the funeral, she was thinking : " Fee would make Enie happy. Why weren't we burying Alf Kerridge to-day ? "

She jumped up nervously, declaring her intention of making a cup of tea.

4

The years drifted by.

Enoch drifted with them. Now and again he would stare whimsically at his silver verge, not a rod but a staff of office, a short, finely decorated mace. With this in hand, and wearing his gown, he would precede the Dean into the Choir : for, on Mr. Vye's retirement, Enoch became the Dean's verger.

The verge, so Enoch reflected, was significant of much.

" The silver verge, with decent pride,
Stuck underneath his cushioned side "

In architecture it was an ornamental shaft ; in agriculture a definite quantity of land. Shakespeare uses the word as a circlet ; it signifies also the horizon ; it indicates boundaries and limits. To Enoch his verge was a symbol of limitations and inhibitions.

The Walk (and Fountains generally) went on regarding Enoch Saint as a quaint survival of the ancient Vicars Choral, possibly a reincarnation of one. Sainly he was—to all outward seeming—sainly he

might have lived and died, had not William Hiles come back to his native town.

Willie's parents were still alive ; his sister, Ann Mary, had married a small farmer who lived thirty miles away. Since the armistice Willie had paid two or three flying visits to Fountains, but Enoch had not met him. Alf Kerridge affirmed that Willie lived by and on his wits. When Alf spoke of Willie as a dirty dog, Enoch observed that a pot ought to know how black the kettle was. Mrs. Vye told him of the traveller's return.

"Willie Hiles is back ; I saw him and spoke to him last night. As you well know, Enie, if I can't speak handsomely of my neighbours, I hold my tongue. But Willie's face gives me the creeps. Wickedder than ever, he is—and proud of it ! Pert too. My word. I wasn't going to tell him I was glad to see him so I just said : 'Why Willie, whatever has brought you back to Fountains ?' And he up and says : 'The three-thirty from Paddington,' and not content with that piece of impudence, he drawls out : 'I wanted to feast my eyes on an honest-to-Gawd face like yours, Mrs. Vye ; it makes me think of the Better Land when I look at you.' And then he grinned at me. I was never one to offer my cheek to the smiter, so I answered up with a grin to match his : 'I can't return that compliment, *Mister* Hiles, but I do say, knowing meself better than you know me, that if you look too long at me the milk of human kindness in me may turn sour.' "

"Excellent," murmured Enoch.

"If you ask me," continued Mrs. Vye, "and I shall say what I think whether you ask me or no, I'm just as sure that Willie is here for no good purpose as I am that bad eggs are bad eggs and ought to be buried—not even thrown on a rubbish heap to poison the air. May be, if we live a little longer, we shall find out why this wastrel and ne'er-do-well is once more pollutin' our Walk."

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"I hope so—Cadger is written all over his face in the devil's own handwriting."

5

For many hours after this talk Willie was in Enoch's mind, not to be dislodged by a mere effort of will. He had disliked him as a boy ; he had hated him later on ; but he never doubted the fellow's cleverness. That, however, was no justification for thinking about him. But Willie brought to mind Bessie. Enoch was obsessed by the conviction—still a matter of surmise—that Bessie's vanishing act was connected in some mysterious way with the too swift joining-up of Willie.

He was alone in the house after supper when Willie knocked at the door.

For a moment, the men took stock of each other. Enoch had regained his health ; but he looked frail, physically a weakling. Willie, nearly as robust as Alf Kerridge, had grown coarse.

They shook hands.

"The same old lad," said Willie, mockingly.

"Come in."

Willie followed his host into the parlour, sat down, and surveyed the old-fashioned furnishings derisively, saying :

"A snug little cell without, I'll bet, a cellar."

"Are you asking for a drink ? "

"If you offer me one, I shan't refuse it."

Enoch opened a cupboard, and placed on a table a bottle of whisky, a siphon, and two glasses.

"Help yourself."

"M'm. That is what I have to do." He threw back his head with a defiant gesture, which Enoch recalled, and quoted : "I care for nobody, no, not I ; and

nobody cares for me." As he helped himself to the whisky, he chuckled : " Cheerio, Enie."

Enoch, filling his own glass, oddly conscious that he was back in the canteen, muttered : " Cheerio ! " He indicated a tobacco jar with a wave of his thin hand, filled his pipe, and watched Willie knocking the end of a cigarette against a small case which was " rolled " if not gold. Possibly Willie read his thoughts.

" Soldier of fortune, I am."

" Home on leave ? "

" I can work here as well as anywhere else. Now, old lad, I want to warn you that you're for it. You're going over the top. Don't squeal ! "

" Are you threatening me ? "

" I don't want to threaten you, but any sort of hullabaloo here would be the talk of the town. I'm going to be frank with you, because I've nothing to lose having already lost—everything. Down and out ! If you were down and out, what would you do for a living ? You don't know, eh ? Just for fun I'm going to tell what I do. I'm a not too successful writer of begging letters. That's a secret between old pals."

" I never was a pal of yours."

" Easy all. Hard words don't soften hearts. It will pay you to be civil ; and it will pay you to realise that I am no longer a perfect gentleman. Before we get down to brass tacks, my congrats, my heartiest congrats. You have, so I'm credibly informed, the respect and affection of nearly everybody in this fool's paradise, nearly everybody. I learn with regret that the Dean has no love for his saintly verger. That item of news is fish to my net. Up till to-day the Dean has been forced to accept you at your current valuation. Long may he continue to do so. But that depends on you, Enie, and—me. High as you have climbed, canonised in your lifetime, I can roll you in the dust. You don't believe it, you secret sinner. But you see, my

dear man, I know all about the secret sin and all about the sinners—a very pretty dish of scandal to set before a bishop and a dean.”

Enoch gulped down his whisky, not trusting himself to speak. Let silence serve him now as it had served him before!

“Wise old bird you are,” said Willie. “And—what a face! You’d love to cut my throat but you look as if you were going to sing ‘Hear, my prayer,’ or ‘Hark the Herald Angels’. Your face must be worth two hundred a year in tips. And I’ll bet you’ve put by a snug sum, unless, which wouldn’t surprise me a little bit, you are still a secret sinner. I’d love to take a snap of you at this minute, and entitle it: ‘A Fallen Angel’. How long ago is it since we sang in the choir together?”

“Lay your cards on the table.”

“I will. When you see them, you can make me a sporting offer, although I may not think it sporting. If you won’t talk, your cash will.”

Enoch remained silent, terrified of “seeing red”. Corporal Saint, Gentleman Saint, the pal of Pete Pick-me-up, was rising from the ashes of camp-fires. Willie drew his chair nearer to the table, and, assuming a Mephistophelean grin, made a gesture as if he were dealing a card.

“I deal the Ace of Trumps. There are other cards, but the Ace will do. I have in my pocket a copy of a letter written by you to Bessie Custard which never reached her. It reached me. You may remember it. If you don’t I can read it aloud. In it you give yourself dead away. One question: have you, by any chance, seen Bessie since she left Fountains?”

“No.”

“Heard from her?”

“No.”

“Good! You have no intention, I see, of incrimin-

ating yourself, so, before we get to haggling, I must give another twist to the screw. The last time you saw Bessie was when you kissed her good-bye in her grandfather's garden after spending two hours with her in his house. I played Peeping Tom on that romantic occasion. Of course I guessed that you two were lovers. I gave you credit for helping yourself freely to what was held out in a spoon. No rotten pun intended. Yes, Enie, I touched my cap to you. I said to myself: 'Enoch Saint is not the good little Joseph which he is cracked up to be.' And then Bessie's grandfather died——"

He paused dramatically with his alert eyes on Enoch's face, divining no doubt that behind an impassive mask a clever man's mind was busy.

"After the funeral she bolted. She had money——"

"You wanted some of it?" asked Enoch savagely.

"Why not? Why not?"

"She ran away from you——"

"And you, Enie."

Enoch winced, recalling her last letter.

"Do you know where she went?"

"To her mother's people."

"Perhaps you've been blackmailing her?"

"Not yet. You might drive me to do that."

"I?"

"If you took all this in the wrong spirit. You see I haven't quite the same hold on her. She is not Enoch Saint, the Dean's verger. She might—I have an idea that she would—tell me to go to blazes; she *might* call in the police."

"Which is what I'm going to do."

"What—? Cut off your own nose? What evidence have you of blackmail? Do you take me for a fool? Come—buy this letter, the original, not the copy—at a fair price."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"So easily. It came about two days after she had

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left. I saw the postman slip it into the letter box. I got into the house through a back window, took the letter and read it. I had a hunch that it held something of interest for me."

"Why have you waited all these years?"

"A sound question! Fairly put. During all these years I have never been so desperately in need of money as I am now. I must have a hundred pounds. It isn't much. Refuse me, and I march to the Dean."

"Who will refuse to take action——"

"Ah! The Ace of Trumps is not enough. I play the King. Has it occurred to you, Enie, that saints can do what sinners can't. F'rinstance—parsons and doctors are allowed a free hand with women, but—don't forget this!—if they abuse their liberty they catch it. You've been playing about with your old love, Felicity."

"Keep her name out of this," growled Enoch.

"Can't be done. Most happy to oblige if I could. Shall I put it this way? Suppose that Alf Kerridge was in and out of another man's house, calling on that man's wife, when her husband was out of the way, wouldn't there be a lot of talk? But you, being you, held in such honour and respect, can do this, because everybody in this town refuses to think ill of you. All the same, you can take it from me that there is talk, just a leetle reek of smoke which so easily could be fanned into a blazing fire. You jolly well know that if Fountains knew the truth about you and Bessie Custard, they'd believe the worst about you and Felicity Kerridge——"

Enoch jumped up. For an instant Willie expected personal violence, a savage assault. Having confidence in his muscles, he sat still. Enoch was trembling with rage.

"You—you——"

"Curse me, if you haven't forgotten how to do it! Let off the steam!"

'Oicars' Walk

With a terrific effort Enoch restrained himself. When he spoke his voice was normal again, although his fingers twitched and itched—! To take this devil by the throat, to squeeze the life out of him, to seal those mocking lips—! What ineffable joy that would be, even if you hanged for it.

"You have said enough. This is blackmail; but I can't prove that. You threaten to blacken my good name and the name of one whom I regard as a sister. And you have caught me unprepared. I refuse to discuss this further to-night. I must think, and think hard, before I act. To-morrow night you shall have your answer."

"Here?"

"Here."

"With a witness hidden away?"

Enoch made a gesture. Willie, after a pause, selected a meeting-place.

"The middle of the biggest field near this town will do, perfectly safe for both of us. There is such a field behind the Asylum with a path running across it. You and I have picked mushrooms there. It's light till past eight. Meet me there at seven-fifteen."

Enoch nodded. Willie took from his breast pocket a sheet of paper, which he dropped upon the table.

"That's the copy of the letter you wrote. Good-night—pleasant dreams."

Head in air, he made a creditable exit.

6

As soon as he was alone, Enoch collapsed into a chair and closed his eyes. The familiar room, the Walk itself, the cathedral church seemed to melt away. Only recently he had been impressed by some story in a magazine which gave a vivid description of a man on horseback crossing an African river at a ford which he

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had crossed and recrossed hundreds of times. In the middle of the river he found himself floundering in shifting quicksands. . . .

He read the copy of the letter, the letter of a boy dashed off on the impulse of the moment. Why hadn't it occurred to him that this letter might fall into the wrong hands? Why indeed?

"My own Elizabeth (he had written):—Your letter has driven me crazy. What has happened? Why didn't I insist on marrying you before I left England. I did mention 'consequences'; and you laughed at me—! I feel that consequences are driving you from Fountains and, perhaps, from me. Do you hate me because I have got you into trouble? Please, write to me fully and at once. I'm sending this by a pal who is leaving for England in a few hours. He'll post it in England. I love you and want you more than ever. Your letter has stunned me. All myself, darling, ENIE."

Yes; the letter of a boy distracted by misery and uncertainty. He could recall how he had felt, and the necessity for haste.

The Dean, if Willie carried out his threat, would send for his verger. What then? Silence would no longer serve him. He would have to answer certain questions, tell the truth or lie. Could he go to the Bishop? He considered this calmly. The Bishop, he felt assured, would understand, but this was a matter for the Dean. And the Dean would resent interference by the Bishop, now too old a man to be placed in a false position.

Could he go to the Dean?

He writhed at the thought of it.

Finally his thoughts concentrated upon Felicity. Willie had made one mistake, misnamed his trumps. Silly to think about that. The rascal's cleverness, and his uncanny knowledge of human nature, had not failed him. Fee's good name was imperilled. What a

devil! To rid the world of this scallywag who had shirked his duty in the war, who boasted that he wrote begging-letters, would be a righteous action. Again, for a few seconds, he saw red, as his imagination conjured up—possibilities. Hadn't old Dr. Guinion said again and again that men and women were "put away" quietly, with none the wiser. Fools, of course, were found out.

He jumped up to gulp down what was left of his whisky and water, horrified by his thoughts, knowing, with acutest conviction, that he, Enoch Saint, had the potentialities of a murderer.

Felicity herself seemed to be laying a restraining hand upon his arm; his mother joined her. He saw both women clearly. But Bessie he could not see. What had that devil suggested? Yes; she had left both of them. . . .

He returned to Felicity.

Suppose he went to her——?

He needed wise counsel. Where could he find it? Poor little Fee would be frightened out of her wits, and never, never would she understand his brief passion for Bessie. What would Alf Kerridge do under similar circumstances? It was more than likely that some blackguard had attempted to blackmail him. Alf would laugh and say: "Go it! Do your damndest. I don't care. The game to me is more than the name."

It struck Enoch with violence that his name, his good name, had become of inordinate value to him. Robbed of that he would be very poor indeed. A wave of self-pity caught him, dashed him against the rocks of destiny, and left him there, bruised, stunned, bleeding, but contemptuous of all weak-kneed railers against Fate. . . .

By this time he was alone with his parents, the stern but kindly father, with only one weakness, and the frail, ethereal mother, so patient under her afflictions, so firm

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in her faith that God did not fail those who trusted in Him. . . .

Thinking of his parents brought back a measure of self-confidence. He was well aware that yielding to blackmail meant scotching a snake without killing it ; Willie intended to rob him of his savings.

Suddenly he laughed, seeing himself clearly as a Merry Andrew. He recalled an unfortunate incident in the social life of Fountains which he had witnessed years ago. A stout lady of rank, the wife of an august county magnate, had graciously consented to open a bazaar in aid of the Clerestory Fund. Miladi was sitting upon a large chair in the centre of a semi-circle of clerical functionaries. As she rose to her feet to deliver her speech some too officious person pulled back her chair, a kindly act designed to give the speaker more room on a crowded platform. But she, engrossed with her speech, was not aware of this. She delivered her speech, was loudly applauded, smiled, bowed, and sat down—on the floor !

Enoch told himself that in his own room in Vicars' Walk, Willie had pulled away a chair unexpectedly but designedly, leaving him flat on his back. Every froth-blower in every parlour in Fountains would split his sides.

Nevertheless, laughing at a ridiculous abasement of the Dean's verger, Enoch recovered his wits. An odd excitement gripped him : the old thrill of the fighting line, the still older thrill of his boyhood when in wild imaginings he had " met " his man, rapier to rapier——

He glanced up at the enlarged photograph of himself as an officer, 2nd Lieutenant Saint, M.M. Still smiling, and speaking aloud his thoughts, as his father had done, he murmured :

" You're asking for trouble, William Hiles, and I think you'll get it."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Bessie

I

"YES," said the Dean coldly. "You have done well to tell me this, Saint."

Enoch and he were alone together in the library of the Deanery. Mr. Marsack at his desk, fiddling nervously with a pencil, slightly flushed of countenance, stiffly dignified, felt less at ease than his verger. Enoch, now that full confession had been made, felt relaxed in mind and body, although sure that his Chief would inform him politely that he had no further use for his services. Let the judge assume the black cap and deliver sentence. Then an unfrocked verger would deal very faithfully with Mr. William Hiles

Unlike his predecessor Dr. Marsack was a handsome man. As an undergraduate, before he took high honours at Cambridge, he may have fluttered some gentle Victorian bosoms; but even then, it might be surmised, he had the grim look of the striver determined to succeed. And, as a schoolmaster, he had succeeded, licking into shape a rough, second-rate public-school, which, when he left it, had attained first rank. A disciplinarian without the saving grace of humour was he, a stickler for the letter of the law, a man of executive ability self-dubbed—Progressive.

As he looked keenly at Enoch's pale thin face, the Dean told himself that he didn't like the man although he respected him. Laying down his pencil, he pushed across the desk the copy of the letter, signifying by a

gesture that he had done with *that*. He had listened without comment to Enoch's story, accepting it as true. Of William Hiles he knew nothing.

"Tell me," said the Dean, "what you propose to say to this scoundrel this evening?"

Enoch smiled, reflecting that the vocabulary of an ex-verger, a sometime private, would have to be emasculated before presentation to a dean. Would this dean understand that?

"What I say to him, sir, will depend upon whether I leave this room as your verger or as a man free to deal with a blackmailer without restraining considerations."

"You will leave this room as my verger, Saint."

Enoch bowed. The Dean went on:

"I cannot take action, even if I wished to do so, upon a matter which happened when you were little more than a boy. But I tell you plainly that I might have to ask for your resignation if any fresh scandal attached itself to you. I am prepared to help; it is my duty to help, but how—how can we silence a mischief-making tongue? You have told me that this unspeakable person threatens the good name of a young wife whom you regard as a sister. But, really, so far as she is concerned, her husband, from the little I know of him, could deal with that."

"He could and would, Mr. Dean, if he knew."

"I suggest, Saint, that you give me ten minutes to think this over. Come back in, say, a quarter of an hour."

"You will allow me to thank you, sir——"

The Dean held up his hand.

"No. This is not a personal matter, because I refuse to make it so. It is an attack upon all who hold dear the sanctities of our cathedral church. *Woe to him through whom offence cometh.*"

Enoch left the library.

He set out to meet Willie that evening rejuvenated by excitement. The Dean and he had agreed upon a plan of campaign. Dr. Marsack accepted certain facts distasteful to him, and then, facing consequences, girded up his loins to impose silence upon a disturber of the common peace.

Willie was unpunctual. When he sauntered up, his general appearance indicated that he had disbursed in riotous living money not as yet in his possession. He greeted Enoch derisively.

"Have you brought the cash?"

"Some of it."

"That's right. Why not all of it? I have the letter."

Enoch looked at his watch. Willie, with increasing insolence, said casually:

"I've been hand-shaking with old friends?"

"Have you any?"

"Now, me lad, none o' your sauce."

"If I refuse to be blackmailed by you, what will you do?"

"What I told you yesterday. Quick march to the Deanery."

"The Dean might ask you why you wanted to injure me."

"I should tell him that you stole my girl before you seduced her."

"He might believe you," said Enoch. "By the way, do you know Mr. Smallpage?"

"You mean the lawyer? Is he your lawyer?"

"No; he's the man who sold Ambrose Custard's sticks of furniture. After you left me last night, it occurred to me that he might know Bessie's address."

"Ho! He doesn't. I asked him."

Bessie

"When?"

"None o' your business, but I don't mind telling you—this morning."

"Thanks. I wanted to make sure that you did not know Bessie's address."

Willie grunted. A first glance at Enoch's face had been reassuring. Enoch's mild voice, so free from rancour, may have raised false hopes. But now Enoch had scored a point.

"Look ye here, Saint, you're behaving like a damned fool. I gave you credit for brains."

"Sit down, Hiles."

Enoch sat, as he spoke, indicating a spot opposite to him. Willie sat down. They were in the middle of the field, close to the path. Enoch had his face to the stile leading to the town, Willie had his back to it. Enoch, therefore, could see any foot-passenger approaching from Fountains, whereas Willie commanded the opposite entrance to the field.

"I'll buy that letter from you," said Enoch.

"I thought you would, me lad."

"At my price, not yours."

"Nothing doing. I'll raise my price, if you waste time haggling."

"I don't waste time or money."

"Just like your dear old Dad."

"I'll offer you twenty pounds for the original letter."

"I raise you eighty. My price is one hundred pounds. I shall make it guineas in a jiffy, if you don't toe my line."

Again Enoch looked at his watch and yawned. Willie attempted to read an expressionless face. Failing to do this he lit a cigarette. He believed that Enoch had surrendered.

Enoch, glancing over Willie's shoulder, saw two men approaching. One wore gaiters.

"What do you do," asked Enoch suavely, "when you find yourself in a tight place?"

"I get out of it. Pay up and look pleasant."

"Suppose I offered you twenty pounds on account?"

"Ah! That's better. I'll take twenty pounds on account; but you don't get the letter till the balance is paid in full, and you needn't ask for a receipt 'cos I'm not such a drivelling idiot as to give one."

Enoch took a note case from his pocket, and slowly fished out twenty pound notes.

"Count them," said Enoch, passing over the cash.

Willie began to thumb the notes. Enoch jumped up.

"Good evening, Mr. Dean," he said

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Willie sprang, nimbly for a stout man, to his feet; and, as he did so, he thrust the notes into his trousers pocket.

"You saw that, Mr. Smallpage?" asked Enoch.

"Yes."

"They are my notes, gentlemen, extorted from me under threat of blackmail. I have their numbers."

Mr. Hiles looked for a moment as if he were contemplating flight. He glanced up and down the path. At each end he saw a policeman. Then he heard Mr. Smallpage speaking:

"Blackmail," observed the lawyer, "is regarded by the Law as such a serious offence that, if fully proved, it calls for about five years' penal servitude."

"Ten, if I were the judge," observed the Dean.

"Hanging, drawing and quartering if I had my way," added Enoch.

There was pause, during which Willie appeared to

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be deflating. Mr. Smallpage eyed him with disdain ; the Dean surveyed him curiously ; Enoch laughed.

" Pay up," he suggested, " and look pleasant."

" I dine at eight," said the Dean, "and I think, Saint, that Mr. Smallpage and you can deal with this rascal without further assistance from me, but I am prepared to testify that I saw this man pocketing money extorted from you."

The Dean strode away. Mr. Smallpage, with a gesture, invited Enoch to open the case for the Crown.

" You can't get out of this tight place, Hiles. It didn't occur to you that I should go to the Dean, did it ? That's where you slipped up. The Dean suggested a quiet talk with Mr. Smallpage. The three of us laid a little trap into which you have tumbled. Mr. Smallpage commandeered two constables. They don't know yet what you have tried to do. They will know, if you don't do what we tell you to do. *Hand over that letter.*"

Willie did so after a moment's hesitation, speeded up, probably, when he saw Mr. Smallpage take from his waistcoat pocket a whistle.

" Return my notes."

The notes were handed over and counted. Enoch struck a match and set a light to the incriminating letter. As soon as it was burnt he addressed the lawyer :

" Would copies of that letter have any value as evidence ? "

" None."

" You hear, Hiles ? But unfortunately, we can't cut out your tongue ; we can only see to it that you don't wag it in Fountains. You will leave here to-morrow and you won't come back, if—if you value your liberty. You are not popular ; we know all about your war record. Don't write begging letters to any man or

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woman in this town. Rest assured that we shan't hesitate to use the evidence we have against you to secure your arrest, if you fail to carry out these instructions. Good-night! pleasant dreams."

Mr. William Hiles withdrew. On this occasion it was not a creditable exit.

4

Dr. Dyson, beguiling old age with speculations concerning youth, had once observed to Enoch that part of the comedy and most of the tragedy underlying human life were due to negligible causes, the little more or less of seemingly trifling importance. Enoch dismissed Willie from his mind; he had come; he had gone; and life drifted on as before. Afterwards, with the clear vision of hindsight, he realised that this passage of arms had turned him once more from a machine into a man. He had fought for his own hand and conquered. The Dean sent for him after Mr. Hiles had left Fountains, and it was on this occasion that Enoch made a remark which puzzled Dr. Marsack and forced him to look at his verger from a new angle. This incident of attempted blackmail had much in common with the unfortunate discussion about the remains of Norman work in the cathedral church: Enoch, in each case, had won a Pyrrhic victory. The Dean, given time and opportunity, might doubtless have thought of another and better way of trapping a would-be blackmailer; but he hadn't. Both he and Smallpage knew that Enoch's wits, resource and initiative had prevailed. To do the Dean justice he acknowledged this frankly enough; and his nicely worded congratulations (after the event) were so unexpected and pleasant that Enoch was moved to say what he thought.

"You dished the rascal," said the Dean. Enoch

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laughed, because "dished" expressed so happily what had taken place. The Dean went on: "I regret that I was not present, but I felt it expedient to leave two capable laymen to deal with a third. However, Smallpage reported what you said, *verbatim*, and then, being alone with a discreet fellow, I was able to enjoy my laugh."

Enoch said indiscreetly:

"It was great fun——"

"Fun——?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I have used the wrong word."

The Dean was not quite satisfied.

"If—if you meant it, Saint——"

Thus challenged, Enoch had to explain himself. Fun, of course, lay on the surface of things, froth and bubble. He expressed himself so well that the Dean encouraged him to go on:

"Yes, yes; I understand: the ludicrous is on the surface, as Aristotle observed."

"It kept us going in the trenches."

The Dean, who had dipped rather disgustingly into post-war literature, said:

"You found fun in the trenches, Saint?"

"Any amount of it."

"Strange."

"Better to cut jokes than to cut and run, sir."

"You are surprising me, Saint."

"I—I surprised myself, then."

"Perhaps—perhaps. I have to turn to the serious side. We have escaped an abominable scandal. I need hardly point out to you, a Churchman, that conditions even here in Fountains are in the melting pot. We, all of us in these Precincts, are a target for shafts bitterly envenomed; we are assailed from without and from within. Offensive tactics force us

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to act defensively. There must be no chink in our armour. I speak to you as man to man."

This was handsomely said, but Enoch left the Presence disconcertingly aware that the Dean had his eye on him. This was a mild joke among the choirboys, who regarded Dr. Marsack as a schoolmaster. He had his eye, so he told them portentously, on all of them. And they, to a boy, wriggled under the conviction that this "eye" was the "I" of the first person singular, the *ego* of omnipotence and omniscience.

"I must mind my step," reflected Enoch.

5

He did mind his step with Felicity, because the Dean had said without mincing of speech that marked attentions to a young married woman were inexpedient. And then, drifting away from her, Enoch became conscious of how much he missed her. He could not determine to his own satisfaction whether or not she missed him. Mrs. Vye, to be sure, had a word to say.

"Fee tells me that you're becoming a reg'lar old hermit crab; and I couldn't break her pore heart by speakin' out to her same as I do to you, Enie. Father an' me knows why you're giving The Open Arms a miss. Too many godless scallywags in the bar parlour, an' too many week-end couples whom the devil has joined together. But Fee needs you more than ever she did."

"She told you so, Auntie?"

"She did."

"I wonder what you said to her——?"

"You needn't, 'cos I'll tell you. To make things easier for you and her I hinted that there had been a bit o' nasty talk. Come to think of it, it was nastiest

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when that there William Hiles was here. Anyways I gave Fee to understand that her own mother was ever so pleased at you keeping away till the talk stopped."

"Was she upset?"

"In a manner o' speakin' she was and she wasn't. She shocked me a bit. I wouldn't for the world repeat what she, or anyone else, said, but——"

Mrs. Vye paused for the encouraging word.

"I can't offer you the world, Auntie, but I'll give you a kiss if you will repeat what Fee said, and I promise you that I won't be shocked."

"Oh, yes, you will," declared Mrs. Vye maternally. "As for me I'm most past shocking these days. Fee was upset at your keeping away, not at the nasty talk; she laughed at that."

"And that shocked you——"

"You wait. Don't hurry me! I was never one to be hurried. Why, when my Joe asked me to marry him, and he took his good time about that, I didn't say more than 'perhaps,' an' it took me three Sundays to say 'yes.' Maids was maids in them ancient days; an' they kept their young men in proper order, no pawin' an' very little o' the pettin' which leads to pawin'——"

"To get back to Fee, Auntie?"

"Oh dear, my dear, may be I oughtn't to tell you. And may be Fee didn't mean what she said. There's a streak o' recklessness in that girl. Now where does she get it from? Not from her dear father; and not, most certingly not, from me."

"From the spirit of the age," suggested Enoch. Then, knowing his old friend as he knew the cathedral church, he said slyly: "I see you don't want to tell me, so let's talk of something else——"

Mrs. Vye replied promptly:

"Alf is paying a lot of attention to a young woman in this town."

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Enoch made a gesture of impatience.

"I know what you're thinking, Enie; he's done that before, and—and, Fee, pore dear, having taken Alf for better or worse, makes the best o' the worse. May be you know that he's told Fee again and again that she comes first?" Enoch nodded. "And Alf has been a kind, generous husband, and always full of his fun, a reg'lar ray o' sunshine."

"True enough."

"Well, dear, this last case is different. Fee tells me—it's a deathly secret—that Alf is so dotty about the hussy that he might go off with her."

"Take it from me, he won't."

"That's what I told her. But—*if* he did."

"If he did, she could divorce him."

"I—I never could hold up my head again——"

"She'd hold up hers."

"You mustn't think the worse of her, Enie, 'cos that's what she told me, that's in her mind, if—if he leaves her—*divorce*, dreadful word."

"Blame her?" he echoed. "My God! I admire her pluck, her patience, and her valiant efforts to make the best of Alf. Blame her——!"

"Mercy! You *are* taking this hard. Enie, dear, own up. Long ago, when you were a boy did you care for my little girl? Someway I always thought you did."

"I—I did care for her."

"God's ways are not our ways. What I wanted. What I prayed for! Why ever did you keep this secret from me?"

"Why indeed?"

"I should feel less miserable," wailed Mrs. Vye, "if I thought you would take care of Fee, if she did up an' divorce Alf, but I'm feeling so dithered and frustrated that I don't know where I am."

"You are borrowing trouble," said Enoch firmly.

Mrs. Vye, as the devil's advocate, provoked a smile from Enoch. Both were bewildered; each clutched at the principles of a lifetime. Enoch was thinking that Mrs. Vye and he were in the Walk, whereas Felicity was outside it. Dominating such reflections was his sense of intimacy with Fee's mother. The long years had brought them together, and—a greater link—their common interest in and love for Felicity. Mrs. Vye's other daughters were dear to her, but uninteresting. Had Fee married the ordinary tradesman she would have become like her sisters. She had married Alf, the most genial scamp in the county; and, being a plastic creature, she had acquired some of his geniality. Nobody accused Alf of being a *faux bonhomme*. He had been born with that Gallic gaiety which is at once natural and yet artful. Alf knew that his smile disarmed wrath. He had taught his wife to smile at nearly everything, even his lapses. Now, as was inevitable, he had gone too far, outstripped patience and forbearance. She had ceased to love him. . . .

Enoch went to the window. Uncle Joe, as he was now called by his adopted son, might come in at any moment. He had retired from the vergership because he suffered from sore feet; but he did odd jobs for the Dean and Chapter and had taken on Enoch's former office of librarian.

Mrs. Vye remained in her chair, knitting furiously, and aware of mental inebriation.

"Are you angry with me?" she asked.

"Why should I be angry?" demanded Enoch.

He stood still staring at the Walk, with its prim, pretty little gardens, its houses so alike, its tall chimneys. Men and women had peered through the same pane of uneven discoloured glass for more than

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two centuries. He heard his old friend's voice with a quaver in it.

"Perhaps I *am* borrowing trouble."

Enoch came back, bent down, and kissed her wrinkled forehead.

"Just now you said that you were ever so pleased that I had kept away from Fee. Suppose she did divorce Alf? She might not wish to marry me. I'm set in the old ways, so are you; she's set in the new ways. We mightn't be happy together."

"Yes, you would. I'm a wicked woman to say so, but if what I say sends me to the bad place I'm a-going to say it. I'd die this instant minute, happy as a queen, if you and my little girl came together. If—if you went off together, I—I should hope for the best and pray to the God of love to forgive both of you."

To his dismay she began to cry.

The Enoch of the trenches, "Gent" Saint, was challenging to mortal combat the Dean's verger. This might be a fight to a finish between dual personalities or a case of demoniac possession. Enoch experienced a mad urge to test Fee's mother, to say brutally: "I'll ask Fee to bolt with me to-night. I'll chuck everything for her; I'll get work in London and work like a black. I want her; if she wants me, the rest of the world can go hang." To this impetuous gentleman, the Dean's verger replied calmly: "Can you get work? Can you support a woman accustomed to have what she wants? Aren't you behaving like a madman?"

The Dean's verger had the best of it. Mrs. Vye dried her eyes; Enoch blew his nose; and, when comparative calm had been restored, old Joe Vye came in and demanded his "tonic."

Nothing happened after this ebullition of feeling. But life subtly changed for Enoch. He kept away from Felicity; he tried to persuade himself that his

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duties sufficed, that he was lucky in being spared the trials and tribulations of so many married men of his acquaintance who complained bitterly of rising prices, a higher standard of living, and steadily increasing rates and taxes.

He left Fountains and spent his semi-annual holiday in London.

In London he met Bessie.

7

He was alone at the time, glancing distastefully at some caricatures of famous people whose faces were familiar to him in the picture papers. Judith had told him that he *must* visit this particular gallery about to be closed. She had insisted too that he should take time over it. Despite this injunction Enoch was late, and when he paid his shilling noticed that other visitors were leaving. He bought a catalogue and glanced about him to find the big room nearly empty. This pleased him ; and yet he resented being pleased. It had come to this—he liked to be alone ; he was losing touch with his fellows.

Irritation assailed him as he began to study the caricatures drawn by a clever and malicious man. Critics had praised them inordinately, a further provocation to Enoch. There seemed to be a pact between critics who wrote for the more popular papers to lavish praise upon musicians, painters, sculptors or writers who repudiated the old standards of beauty and decency. Most of these drawings were grotesques and indecently so. Judith had said : " All London is laughing over them." If this was true all London laughed at deliberate cruelty. But all London was such a silly expression. He was contemplating retreat when a lady entered.

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Enoch, at first, was not quite sure that this could be Bessie. Then he decided that it could be nobody else. Would she recognise him? And, if she did, would she speak to him or pass him by? Her appearance was staggering. She looked a lady of quality. On entering the gallery, she had turned to stare at the first drawing nearest to her. At the moment she had her back to him. He hesitated. The light came from a huge skylight. Enoch moved nearer to Bessie, taking up a position in front of a drawing which she must pass in a minute or two. He would give her time to recognise him whilst he was looking at the drawing. . . .

As she approached, knowing that she must have noticed his profile, he turned his face to her. She gave a little gasp and held out her hand.

"Enie——!"

"Yes, Bessie. I—I knew you at once."

"After all these years——!"

"They have not treated you ungenerously," he observed. For an instant there was silence, as each surveyed the other. He went on: "Am I to ask any questions?" He read distress in herumber eyes. "Perhaps," he continued, "you would let me call on you, or, if you prefer it, lunch with me at some quiet restaurant?"

"We can talk here," she replied, indicating a divan at the farther end of the room.

They sat down. The woman asked the first question.

"Are you living in London?"

"I'm visiting my sister Judith. I'm the Dean's verger. I live alone in the house where I was born."

She sighed.

"You have not changed much," she murmured.

"But you have—enormously."

"Oh, yes."

Bessie

He attempted to compute the change. She had lost her girlish bloom ; she had gained distinction and poise ; her voice had softened. She looked neither happy nor unhappy. Any discriminating observer, meeting her for the first time, would have said : " This woman is intelligent and sensitive." Her silence was interpreted aright by Enoch. He had little to tell her ; she had much to tell him.

Her first words recalled the defiant Bessie of the Walk. She indicated with a mocking gesture the drawings on the walls.

" They are jeering at us, Enie."

" Bessie," he said. " I—I don't know what you believe or disbelieve. There are moments when we seem to be tossed here and there by circumstance. The man who made these drawings must feel that. There are other moments when we see purpose and design. Is it coincidence that you and I have met again ? I don't believe that. If I did——"

" Yes ? "

" I should ask you to say nothing. Why should you break the silence of the years ? To gratify my curiosity ? No. But if you want to speak, to—to explain, why then I ask you to explain fully. Something has happened within the past few weeks, a very hateful experience, which is linked up with this meeting to-day."

" Tell me——"

He told her about Willie Hiles. At the first mention of his name she winced ; then her face hardened. Not till the end of the story did he mention the stealing of the letter.

" He lied about that——"

" What ? "

" He stole your letter from me. I got it."

" Why didn't you answer it ? "

She glanced about her. Two old ladies were making

Vicars' Walk

the round of the gallery, laughing and chattering. Within twenty minutes the exhibition would be closed.

"I—I intended to answer it—later."

8

He perceived that she was evading the real issue. Could he force it? No. She began hesitatingly, tentatively, glancing at him, and then away from him. To make matters worse, she began at the end; wisely, it is true, if she wished to set forth the end as justifying the beginning. From what she said he gathered that she was married, had two children; and was living prosperously in Hampstead; but she gave no address and withheld her name. Enoch accused himself of being ultra sensitive, but she seemed to be trying to impress him with her good fortune, and she spoke in low hurried tones as if dreading interruptions. Enoch held his tongue. With every word she uttered, he felt himself to be drifting farther and farther away from her. Did she want him to feel that?

Suddenly, leaving the inglorious ease of the present, she plunged back into the past.

"When Granfer was dying, he told me that I had an uncle, my mother's brother, a doctor in London, who might help me, if I went to him"

"You wanted to go to a doctor? What I hinted at in my letter, the letter Hiles stole, was true?"

"It wasn't."

"Oh-h-h!"

"If—if it had been——"

"Yes?"

"I should have begged you to marry me."

She went on to tell him that her grandfather had explained, before he died, the absence of her name

Bessie

from the family Bible. Her mother had left a hateful husband with Ambrose Custard's son whom she had never married because the husband refused to divorce his wife. All the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune had assailed the eloping couple.

This was enlightening so far as it went. But it did not explain Bessie's last despairing letter.

"Are you," he asked, with a tinge of irritation, "trying to make me understand that things have turned out for the best?"

"Yes; I am."

"You have no regrets?"

She shrugged her shoulders. In a different voice, almost pleadingly, she continued:

"You are a man; you can't understand how I felt when Granfer died. Willie Hiles had found out about us. He must have seen the postman deliver that letter. I read it and put it into Granfer's desk. Next day I missed it. Only Willie could have taken it. I taxed him with taking it. He owned up and said that he'd burnt it. We parted, after a terrible row——"

"At your gate?"

"How do you know?"

"Arthur Kerridge saw you."

"Did he? He hated me. I—I wanted to escape from the Walk for ever and ever. I had money to do it."

"So you rushed to your uncle."

"Ye—es."

"And he behaved like a human being."

"I—I found him hard at first, but he got me work. I had to work. I liked my work. And—and I loathed more and more the idea of going back to Fountains——"

"I suppose that I, if I were not killed, meant Fountains to you?"

"Ye—es."

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" I—I see."

" Willie told me that really you loved Felicity Vye, and I believed him because I had suspected as much ; and I had flung myself at your head. I made sure that you would marry Felicity. Why didn't you ? "

" Because she married Alfred Kerridge."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Beauty Competition in Fountains

I

WHEN these two parted nothing was said about meeting again. At the last, just before they were turned out of the gallery, Enoch asked awkwardly :

"Are you happy, Bessie?"

"Is anybody happy? I live my life, which has its distractions. I was never sentimental, never! But I shall tell Saint Peter when the time comes that I am entitled to a halo because I left you, Enie. If we two had married——"

"Suppose we had——"

"You wouldn't be what I'm sure you are, old fellow, one of God's Good Men."

There was no derision in her voice; but Enoch answered irritably :

"It's childish to speculate upon what might have been."

She smiled at this, and held out her hand. Then, and not till then, he remembered the three handkerchiefs, still in his possession, still unused. But, when he thanked her, she declared that she had not sent them. She had sent the bronze wreath; and one day, she might, if she happened to be in the West Country, flit through Fountains. Would she be recognised? Before Enoch had time to answer the question, she had gone.

For a few minutes he sat quietly on a bench in Leicester Square. His feelings were contradictory as he attempted to measure the change in Bessie.

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Provocative charm would be hers, probably till she died. *Who had sent those handkerchiefs?* Felicity? No. Illumination came swiftly. Dr. Dyson's niece had sent them. Of course. Exactly what she would do. And he, sentimental ass, had made so sure that the gift had significance, that it meant: "You are not forgotten; be patient, and things will adjust themselves in time." Nevertheless these handkerchiefs had kept green memories which had come between him and Felicity. He thought: "I'm a dull dog; somehow I've bungled and mucked up my life."

He glanced about him, watching the foot-passengers hastening by intent on their own business. Few paused to survey with interest a trim garden, a wilderness some sixty years previously, reclaimed by the Company-promoting Baron Grant, whose real name—according to Mr. E. V. Lucas—was Gottheimer (made a baron by the King of Italy). Enoch, who happened to be reading *London Revisited*, recalled the epigram which said that though kings can grant titles,

". . . honour they can't.
And titles lacking honour are a barren grant."

Upon benches thoughtfully provided by the Baron sat waifs and strays, most of them professional beggars who dared not ply their trade in so public a place. At the end of Enoch's bench an old woman watched two guttersnipes dancing. Catching Enoch's eye, she said hoarsely; "Used to dance myself, kept it up longer than most. Used to march up and down the Prom at the old Empire. And my word, they didn't let everyone in." She waved a prehensile claw at a famous night restaurant. "In the Champagne Charley days," she added regretfully, "I buzzed many a bottle of the best over there. No complaints, I've had my day and many a roaring night too."

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She mumbled on, not a whiner, a fact which drew half a crown from Enoch. She had sold flowers in Piccadilly Circus before the war ; she loved her glass. But pluck sustained her. She told Enoch candidly that she hung about clubs, making a living off the boiled-shirted who dined well. Some elderly gentlemen she had known when they belonged to the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade. . . .

He walked back to Judith's house in South Kensington. Passing a shop-window gay with many-coloured socks and ties, he paused to inspect the wares. With a shrug of the shoulders he passed on, reflecting that the ties of Fountains at half the price were good enough for a dreary drudge.

He cheered up at dinner, but made no mention of meeting Bessie. When his sister asked him what he thought of the caricatures, he replied acidly :

"Most middle-aged persons are caricatures of what we may presume God intended them to be."

He went to bed sorry that he had met Bessie, convinced from her manner that she had left him . because she realised that he could not give her what she wanted. She had made him feel class-conscious, a word he detested. He thought that long ago he had soared above class consciousness.

2

Back in the Walk he destroyed Bessie's letters. Alone with Sir Francis Drake, the fourth of the dynasty, and now in his prime, certainly the wisest dog in Fountains, Enoch considered anew the married state, erasing, so to speak, Felicity and Bessie.

"Unity," said Enoch to the canny Scot, "is ready to take another dip into the lucky bag ; and we should have the children—all ready made, eh ? "

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The Aberdonian blinked; his tail barely flickered because he knew that Unity was no lover of dogs. During a pregnant silence he laid his head on Enoch's knee, as much as to say: "If you want to talk rot don't mind me."

"We should cheer each other up," continued Enoch in a dubious tone.

"Take me for a brisk walk," said Drake.

"Right! I will."

They walked to The Open Arms.

Here Alf received them as honoured guests.

Meanwhile, what Enoch had said to Mrs. Vye about borrowing trouble had been justified. Alf had not eloped with a good-looking hussy, and was not likely to make such an idiot of himself. But—to use his own fatuous expression—he "played about" with her. Whereupon Mrs. Vye had entreated Enoch to remain friends with Alf, and to bestow what leisure he could spare upon Felicity.

Alf was still a handsome man, too stout for his years, with an increasing tinge of purple in his cheeks, but hale, hearty and overbrimming with genial interest in his own affairs. He grinned at Enoch, and took him by the arm.

"Fee is out. You come into the parlour. I'll give you a drop of Bristol Milk that will make your hair curl. Can you stop to dinner? Fee is rather miffed with you, because, so she says, you think yourself too good for us. Tosh, of course. What? How's biz? Might be better, might be worse. If you were a sport, o' man, I'd give you a dead snip, a real sitter."

They passed through the bar and into the parlour beyond.

Alf, as he sipped his sherry, discoursed about his successes, not mentioning losses. Enoch knew that losses outweighed gains. Nobody, not even Felicity, could say how much was left of Alf's patrimony.

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"My stock is booming. Had a little flutter in Nickels, and took my profit like a man—backed two winners yesterday. You think me a happy-go-lucky chap, don't you?"

"I don't think about you, Alf."

"You might do worse, old lad. It fair breaks my heart to see you missing such barrels of fun. I've done well over the dogs lately, nothing to write home about. Why don't you have a go? On the strict Q.T. It would put binge into you. And, looky here, if there is one form o' luck that never fails, it's beginner's luck. I've dropped a parcel over systems and what not. Last Saturday I took a little bit of skirt to the Greyhounds, first time of asking for her. She told me that five was her lucky number, born on the fifth day of the fifth month. We backed the fifth dog at eight to one and copped a small packet. There you are."

Enoch experienced a thrill, but the captious may assign credit (or blame) for what followed to the Bristol Milk. Alf went on in his jolly bantering voice:

"What's the worst hour of the day for you? I'll tell you: along about six-thirty. And that's the moment when the evening paper is dirt cheap at a penny, that's the moment, old bird, when I give the boy sixpence, if I've backed a winner. 'All the winners——! 'Ere y' are——! All the winners!' Now—s'pose you've backed losers? What of it? Haven't you had your thrill? And then comes the leetle drink, the gargle. Win or lose, don't it taste good?"

"Yo, heave, ho! And a bottle of rum," quoted Enoch.

"Is that Shakespeare?"

"Stevenson. A line out of *Treasure Island*."

"Say that again," said Alf, in great excitement.

"A line out of *Treasure Island*."

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"Suffering Mike! If this isn't the hunch of the holidays! Why did you drop in this evening? Any particular reason?"

"N-no. I wanted to take the tyke for a walk."

"I read the book when I was a boy. *Treasure Island* is a treasure hunt, isn't it?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"What of it——! Sit tight. Have another glass of the Milk? You won't? You will presently. Have you ever been on a treasure hunt?"

"Only at a church *fête*, Alf."

"I'm calculating what beginner's luck is worth if the beginner is gettin' past mark o' mouth. How old are you, laddie?"

"Three years younger than you, you miserable sinner."

"I'm a sinner all right, but I'm not miserable. Has it ever occurred to you that you'll be a long time dead? Now, Enie, I want to tell you about a pal o' mine, a one-horse man, just such another as that butcher at Chichester who owned Priory Park. My pal owns a four-year-old called *Treasure Hunt*. Have you got it?"

"Not yet."

"*Treasure Hunt* ran in a race last year in too good company. He's running to-morrow, carrying seven stun seven, with one o' the best in the pigskin. My pal thinks that the handicappers have slipped up, because this time he's in poorish company. I can get a hundred to eight. Your hunch looks to me the best ever. If you're a mouse, I'll back the horse myself—I was going to do that anyway—and I'll put a quid on for you, for old sake's sake——"

"No, you won't."

"What?"

"You can put eight pounds on for me. I'll give you the cash now."

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3

Next day there were more trippers in the Cathedral Church than usual. Often Enoch asked himself: "Are tips from trippers treasure trove?" He was getting weary of idiotic questions, gaping mouths, and pert flappers. But, being his father's son, he enjoyed pocketing the sixpences. The Dean admitted that he earned them. Dr. Marsack, however, had curtailed these tips. In Dr. Dyson's time, the vergers accompanied visitors when they passed out of the Nave into the Choir, where, beyond lay the lovely Lady Chapel and the incomparable Chapter House. Instead of this personally conducted tour, visitors were now invited, nay, enjoined, to accept temporarily a thin text book (admirably written) which served in lieu of a guide, and to slip (before passing the gate) a three-penny bit or a sixpence into a box near the gate. The money in this box—no inconsiderable sum—was paid each night into the Fund for the Restoration of the Western Front. Fortunately for the vergers, the Cloisters, the Nave, and the miraculous clock remained a never failing source of revenue.

Upon this particular afternoon Enoch allowed "diction" to degenerate into "patter." *Treasure Hunt* made hay of it, and when he mentioned Lightfoot, the maker of the clock, fancy dwelt upon a bay gelding. The motto *Sic peragrat Phæbe*, "So travels the Moon," begat the pious wish that *Treasure Hunt* might travel even faster. Finally, when the knights raced round their miniature course, Enoch was transported to a paddock far away, where, in the Judge's stand, he beheld Jack Blandifer striking with his heels the fateful hour.

At 3.45 on this eventful day, *Treasure Hunt* romped home, an easy winner, which justified a celebration. Enoch dined with Felicity and Alf;

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and Felicity was sworn to secrecy. She rejoiced so unaffectedly over beginner's luck that she forgot to point the obvious moral.

After dinner, when Alf was busy elsewhere, Felicity accused Enoch of neglecting old friends ; but she did it charmingly. Nevertheless she made it plain that she was unhappy lacking his companionship, and had missed it sorely. Against his better judgment, beguiled by her tender voice, Enoch pledged himself to amend hermit-crab ways which Felicity held in disdain and fear.

" You are becoming a monk, and soon will look like one. I have told you that I missed you horribly, did you miss me ? "

" Measurably, yes, measurably."

" You love to tease me."

" Because you're still a child."

She smiled at him.

" Tell me what you did in London town ? "

He did so, making no mention of Bessie. Fee was enormously interested in Judith, who might be reckoned a real lady. Judith of course was lucky. It pleased Enoch that Fee was not jealous of his sister, as so many women might have been ; and it pleased him even more that Alf's wife was incapable of self-pity. On the other hand he was displeased with her restlessness. Why couldn't she take life more quietly ? He did tease her when she spoke, without Christian resignation, of grievances. Alf expected her to " run " The Open Arms. This had been a labour of love to Alf's mother, exalted as a model of what an innkeeper's wife should be. Felicity had no aptitudes for being all things to all customers. Alf quoted the French tag : " The client is never in the wrong." But Fee refused to be obsequious to faultfinders ; she resented criticism whether just or unjust ; she hated (as Alf did) petty economies and cheeseparings.

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She was thrilled to the marrow over an approaching carnival. A queen had to be selected. Ladies (including spinsters and married women) were invited to submit photographs. Out of all competitors one hundred would be adjudged "possibles" who would undergo the ordeal of a public competition and parade. The first prize included the coronation robes (a frock to be bought by the winner) and a cheque for ten guineas, not to mention wide publicity. Alf, without consulting his wife, had sent off a photograph of her taken five years previously. This was a joke not perhaps in the best of taste. Mrs. Kerridge's portrait appeared in the *Western Banner* (together with half a dozen others); and it was predicted that she might be crowned Queen of Fountains. Alf, never happier than when playing with fire, had persuaded his new lady to submit her photograph. To Enoch's dismay he was asked by Fee to pass a few remarks, personal remarks, upon a subject distasteful to him.

"Do you think I'm better looking than she is, Enie?"

"Yes; I do."

"That's sweet of you. It would be such a sell for Alf, 'cos he's so sure that hateful little cat will be chosen. She's conceited enough already, and if she's crowned queen she'll lose her head——"

"Katharine of Aragon was not too unhappy when Anne Boleyn lost hers."

"Please don't joke! It's terribly serious for me. I don't say there's anything wickedly wrong between Alf and this smirking idiot, but he's caught, as usual, by her pretty face. Nothing queenly about her! Apart from winning the prize, if the judges put me above her, Alf would be proud of me. You know that——"

This was pathetic. Enoch said hastily:

"I hate the idea——"

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"Of my being queen?"

"Of you prancing about, showing off, making a penny gaff of yourself and all that. Revolting!"

"I don't care; I—I want to get even with Alf. He sent in my photo for a joke; but now, because it was published in the *Banner*, he wants me to compete. He said this morning: 'Have a cut at it, old girl,' and just because I'm getting an old girl, I should love to make one more splash."

"Right! I say you're cheapening yourself; but do you care tuppence what I think?"

"Course I do."

"You go your own way."

"But, Enie, who doesn't? What other way should I go? You go your way; and I think it's a silly, joyless way. Alf and I agree about that. Still, I don't quite despair of you since yesterday. Alf says that you've tasted blood——"

She laughed gaily.

Enoch remained silent.

4

Two days later, Alf—out of sheer exuberant mischief—suggested to the Carnival Committee (of which he was the leading spirit) that Mr. Enoch Saint ought to be asked to serve as one of the judges. The Committee chuckled but agreed that the suggestion was happy. The Dean's verger—to be sure—was a lover of the beautiful and a man of parts. His judgment could be relied on. More, the Carnival was under the distinguished patronage of the Close.

Accordingly, the unexpected came to pass. Dr. Marsack, after Vespers, appeared in the vergers' room. To his surprise Enoch knew nothing of the honour about to be conferred.

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"I ask you to serve, Saint."

"Sir!"

"Yes, yes; I can guess what's in your mind; but I see this from the lay angle. We must not keep out of what concerns and interests the town. Both his lordship and I propose to attend the Beauty Competition. Why not? We feel that our attendance will be accepted as—how shall I put it?—a gesture of goodwill. Youth must be served. And we mustn't forget that part of the profits of the Carnival are earmarked for our Restoration Fund. Again, we think that it's very plucky of our girls to come forward, to submit to what must be a trying experience. So, I repeat, Saint, that we hope you will accept the judicatory office. What say you?"

Enoch had plenty to say, but did not say it, taken aback by the twist of circumstances. Finally, under pressure, he surrendered to importunity. The *Banner* had a paragraph; Fountains acclaimed a former wonder boy as a Man of the Moment.

More repercussions.

Looking back afterwards, Enoch had reason to contend that circumstances are too much for ninety-nine persons out of every hundred. After meeting Bessie, he had wanted to withdraw into himself. Instead he was pitchforked out of himself, agreeably sensible that he was not yet immune from the lure of excitement. Once more interest in *persons* began to reassert supremacy.

5

Mrs. Golledge was a person, almost a personage, the "old dear" who, in the language of the Walk, "did for" Enoch in the capacity of a general servant. Enoch called her "General" and submitted to her better judgment in domestic matters. She did his

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marketing, cooking, and house-cleaning ; and had him, where most women love to have men, under her thumb.

Sarah Golledge belonged to the Walk, although she lived outside it. Her father had been a singing man. But when he lost his voice, he degenerated into a "caslety," a snapper-up of odd jobs, a "has been" with an unslakable thirst. Meanwhile Sarah married Golledge, whose mother had been a Sunshion. Golledge's father lived and died a sexton. Golledge, according to Sarah, had dug his grave with his teeth, but intermittently, when not engrossed by the pleasures of the table, he had trafficked in foodstuffs for trippers, picture postcards, guide-books, souvenirs, and faked "Stafforsheer" supplied by a Bristol dealer. Constant intercourse with trippers had sharpened Sarah's wits without destroying, as might be expected, her fervent faith in human nature. She had much in common with the immortal Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. Drake refused to discuss the Beauty Competition, but Sarah had plenty to say about it.

"I'm not feeling very grand to-day," she told Enoch, "but there may be more in this, seemin'ly, than meets my old eyes."

"Explain yourself, General."

"Well, the ony sweet tooth left in me yed is achin' crool at this minnit. 'T is an anchor tooth and holds me upper plate in me mouth when I wears it o' Sundays, so I ain't a-goin' to have 'er out. Someways, when I gets the toothache, I sets me mind on others an' tries to fergit meself. You're a-goin' to help choose a Queen o' Beauty, an', likely as not, you'll up an' choose a wife. The Walk says it's a nopportunity, an' so 'tis."

"If you feel that way, General, you might, with your wonderful experience, give me some sort of an idea what to look for."

"I will—an' gladly. I'd choose a proper wife for

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'ee, yes, I would. Bein' so thin, you want something plump and cuddlesome. An' bein' so set in men's ways an' habits, I'd pick for 'ee a youngish maid wi' no nonsense 'bout 'er, the dead spit o' what I was afore I was mishandled by Sam Golledge. They be hard to come by these days I sees you a-settin' there, an' all the maids peacockin' in front of 'ee. Don't 'ee have any truck wi' they. Presen'ly ther's bound to trip along a modest maid, wi'out paint on her face, and wi'out fractiousness. If she 'as a blush left, so much the better. Do 'ee find out if she says 'er prayers. You'd never marry no heathen, would 'ee? "

"My dear old friend, you're living in the remote past. There aren't any such maids left."

"Not in Fountains, maybe. The wife I 'as in me mind won't be town-bred. They tells me that the lil country dears be all of a dither over this yere Beauty Show. Do 'ee pick one o' they."

"You're a wise old gammer."

"That I be. You do as I bid 'ee."

Enoch laughed.

Mrs. Golledge had justifiable faith in her own sagacity and chicane. Secretly she didn't want a kind master to marry because that meant the loss of a good place. Secretly also she was haunted by the fear that Enoch might marry Unity Sibbick——! A widow, if she gave her mind to it, could marry any man. Surely, the Dean's verger would never marry a country bumpkin.

Meanwhile the Beauty Competition became an event of absorbing local interest.

The Editor of the *Western Banner* invited Enoch to contribute a short article on "Carnival", which he

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wrote with humorous appreciation of the many meanings of the word. This would have been a task after Dr. Dyson's own heart. Did it mean "Farewell flesh," or "Solace of the Flesh"? The season—according to the lexicographers—had been called "flesh-relaxing," "flesh taking," and (necessarily) "flesh-eating." Fountains read Enoch's article, and discussed it. Gossip had it that his lordship, now a venerable survivor of happier days, expressed a wish that he had written it.

Alf Kerridge was self-appointed Lord of Misrule. The Carnival Week, after the selection of the Queen, began with a ball. And this ball was to be a pulling-down of social barriers. Town and county would meet on equal terms. The Lord Lieutenant, who had promised to bring a party, would open the joyous proceedings with the Queen—Her Majesty and His Grace!

The "Week" included a West of England Agricultural Show, a fair, a cricket match, water polo, a championship at bowls, and innumerable side-shows. Careful provision was made for the housing and feeding of visitors. Enoch pointed out that at Glastonbury, when the great Abbey Church was regarded as one of the wonders of Christendom, some thirty thousand pilgrims were entertained in one day.

The Mayor and Corporation, not to mention the Dean and Chapter, agreed that an amusement tax must be levied on the whole undertaking as apart from subsidiary entertainments like the ball. This tax would further help to replenish the depleted coffers of the Restoration Fund.

To get inspiration for the article (now a very definite article) Enoch surveyed the Western Front of the Cathedral Church. His eyes lingered upon one of the finest of the exquisitely wrought figures, a tall slender woman magnificently draped, who, despite the labours

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of Dr. Dyson, defied identification. She might have been a female saint; she might have been a lay patroness. She wore a girded gown with a large round brooch. Sir Claud Font declared that the drapery was equal to the best work of the Greeks. Dr. Marsack's daughters were stage-managing a series of *tableaux* copied from the scenes in the quatrefoil panels, such as Noah building the Ark, Christ and the Doctors, Adam delves and Eve spins, and the angel holding a crown in each hand. Enoch had suggested to the Misses Marsack this series, and—although they approved it and charged themselves with adequate representation—the Dean's verger had a suspicion that his chief would have been better pleased if an archdeacon had conceived and brought forth the happy idea.

Staring at the figure of the unknown lady, Enoch found his thoughts dwelling upon Felicity. Immediately he named the figure Felicity, because she looked so happy. What was sacred and profane in him met and merged, provoking the un-Levitical exclamation :

“ *Gosh——!* ”

7

Half an hour later he found Mrs. Kerridge in her garden, a more fitting setting than the bar-parlour. Alf, shortly after his marriage, had seen commercial possibilities in this garden as a glorified tea-garden. He had wit enough to consult a landscape gardener of local distinction who foresaw a perennial advertisement of his talents. The result had been charming. Now, after ten years, it was a pleasure worthy of the old inn, once, as has been said a manor house.

Felicity misread the expression upon Enoch's face.

“ Heavens! Is Mum ill? ”

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He reassured her. Had she chosen her frock for the Beauty Competition? Not yet. Alf wanted what she did not want, something brocaded and eye-smiting. Could she count on an old friend to side with her against a too masterful man?

Enoch's slow, pervasive smile, his chief asset, displayed itself.

"Fee, do you want to win this competition?"

As he put the question he surveyed her critically. She had retained her figure and her youthful good looks. She had taken care of herself. Alf, with all his faults, encouraged her to do so. Now and again when Enoch accused her of vanity, she replied seriously that she prinked for her husband, to find favour in his sight; and Enoch knew this to be true. She answered gaily enough:

"Of course I do, but I haven't a chance, not an earthly——"

"Suppose I suggested something heavenly——?"

"Heavenly——?"

"Oblige me. Walk to the sundial. Stand beside it, try to look as I've seen you look when Nunkle was playing the organ. Thanks. Left hand at the side, resting upon your thigh; right hand slightly raised. Good. Don't move! Smile a little. Tch! Hold that. Once more—Gosh!"

A minute later, seated on a bench in the shade of an ancient mulberry tree, he explained. Incidentally, he pointed out the difficulties confronting the judges. They had to select a queen, not a pretty milkmaid. An authority on church architecture had declared the figure of the unknown woman to be a queen. Dr. Dyson disagreed inasmuch as the lady was not wearing a crown, although the arrangement of her hair suggested a coronal. Felicity's hair was long enough to tuck up under a plain mediæval circlet, such as a princess might wear who had reasonable expectation

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of becoming a queen some day. He suggested an exact copy of the drapery.

Fee clapped her hands.

"Enie—you're wonderful. I can send to London for some soft shimmery tissue, white with threads of silver. I won't tell Alf or anybody. You get me a photo of the figure. Nobody will think of doing this, and everybody will say it's so right, but—not a word."

"Not a word," said Enoch.

"You are taking a big interest in the Carnival."

"Interest has been thrust on me. I stepped into the affair as a man steps into too hot a bath, very gingerly, but now I'm keen. It's fun, honest fun; but, at this minute, it's more than fun."

"What can you mean?"

"I—I hated to think of you dolled up, parading in front of a big crowd, and I knew——"

He paused.

"Please go on——"

"I knew that some of the old cats in the Walk would say that this is a show for young girls, not married women, but it isn't. We shall award the first prize on points; we are agreed on that. So much for features, carriage, proportion, colouring, extremities and expression. The young girls don't know what they're up against. The Committee have decided to include among the judges three ladies. That makes things easier for me."

"Why?"

"If I were one of only three judges, I might hesitate to record my vote for you, if—if I had suggested your gown and all that."

"Yes; I see."

"I can promise you that I shan't vote till I have the votes of the other five. One thing more to encourage a too modest young woman——"

"I'm thirty-three."

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" You don't look it this morning. I submit to you that the Committee will not appoint young girls as judges. Probably they will secure, if they can, the services of one great lady ; the other two will be townswomen. Human nature crops up divertingly on such occasions. If the judges are no longer young, it will be a joy to them if they can select as queen a competitor who triumphs over mere youth and youthful prettiness—— "

" Enie, you're a perfect darling ! "

" I—I believe that you have more than a sporting chance ; but your appearance on the platform must come as an immense surprise to the other judges and to the audience. The audience must acclaim the verdict of the judges. If it leaks out what you're up to, somebody else may copy another of those splendid figures."

Felicity nodded. Enoch hastened back to his duties.

8

The night of the competition came. Up to the last moment it was doubtful whether or not the entertainment would fill the biggest hall in Fountains, a sometime skating-rink. By mid-day it was known that the reserved seats were all sold. The cheaper seats, at a shilling apiece, were not reserved. Alf predicted a packed house.

When the doors opened, there was a rush. The *Banner* had spread the exciting tidings that the Committee had secured as a judge the lovely married daughter of a territorial magnate. She made the seventh judge, and the fourth lady, with no vote save a casting vote if the votes of the others were equal.

A brief conference preceded the overture. The judges met in a small room. The seventh judge was

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entreated to take the chair. Finally, amid sustained cheering, the seven marched ceremoniously into the hall, and sat down in seven armchairs facing the stage. In front of each judge was a small table furnished with a pad of notepaper and a pencil.

One hundred ladies, from all parts of the town and county, presented themselves. A tall young man, debonair and graceful, officiated as Master of the Ceremonies. After the curtain rose, he appeared leading the bevy of beauties. Each competitor carried a card with a number inscribed upon it.

The audience cheered as the Beauties filed by. The lady in the chair whispered to Enoch, who sat on right: "I couldn't have believed that there could be such enthusiasm." Enoch whispered back: "We haven't had a carnival in Fountains for nearly four hundred years."

It was impossible to decide whether the audience was cheering all or sundry. Each competitor, as she passed the line of judges, paused for a second and bowed. Many of the younger girls exhibited stage-fright, a pathetic nervousness. Some overplayed their parts, assuming a deportment too austere or too flamboyant; some, very few, appeared to be insensitive to the ordeal, perfectly natural under harrowing circumstances.

Felicity came on about the middle.

As she paused before the central judge, Enoch heard a buzz as of swarming bees. He glanced at Alf who was sitting at a small table with other members of the Executive Committee. Alf's face was a study in conflicting emotions; and instantly Enoch knew that Fee had kept her secret. Alf was open-mouthed with amazement, staring at the slim silvery figure whom he could hardly recognise as his wife. Then he too began to clap his hands madly.

Again the lady in the chair whispered to Enoch:

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"Who is the woman in those marvellous draperies?" Enoch replied that she was the married daughter of his predecessor, Mr. Joseph Vye, and that the drapery of her gown had been copied from one of the figures on the Western Front.

The curtain fell. The band began to play a Strauss walse. The audience had seen all the competitors. When the curtain rose again, the Beauties would come on in sections of ten, and stand in front of the judges, who, each according to his or her fancy, would jot down two numbers out of ten. Presently, when the ten sections had been weeded out, the survivors would reappear.

This standing still was a greater ordeal than the slow march past. An uncanny silence fell upon the audience as the competitors lined up. The *chef d'orchestre* held his *bâton* poised for an interminable half minute. When the buzz of talk began again, the musicians played on slowly, rhythmically, languorously.

It was Enoch's duty to collect the ballots, and to set down upon a separate sheet the numbers of the survivors. Felicity's number was 54; and 54 was inscribed upon each of the five papers handed to Enoch. But, in the previous five sections, there had been three or four outstanding figures, and the audience knew that one young lady had won a Beauty Competition in Bristol. She was very pretty, but perhaps a thought too conscious of it. Another competitor, so Enoch reflected, suggested Tess of the d'Urbervilles, tall, deep-bosomed, a typical West Country beauty. Enoch wondered if the judges would take critical note of ankles too thick and extremities of too generous proportions. The lady in the chair whispered: "A Hebe, but no quality."

The curtain fell amid a muffled roar of talk. Out of one hundred competitors eighty had been rejected.

Four sections of five would now confront the judges,

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who had to select two of each five, leaving eight finalists. The judges, without appeal to the casting vote of the Chair, had agreed upon two selected out of each section of ten, easy work so far.

The twenty paraded as before, led by the M.C. Obviously the house approved the selections, for the applause was ear-splitting so long as the parade lasted.

The first five took up their positions. Tension indicated itself. One girl was biting her lip; another looked as if she wanted to bite her nails; the slender fingers of a third were twitching. Hebe happened to be in the first section. She came from Taunton, but Enoch and the other judges were unaware of this. To them she was Number Three. She wore a not too becoming frock. Suddenly, beneath the concentrated stare of the judges she blushed, frowned, gave an impatient stamp of her foot, and smiled. This delighted the audience. Simultaneously the judges scribbled *three* upon their writing-pads.

Beside Tess stood a pocket Venus, Number Seven. She was admirable proportioned with delicate features, and she displayed, to the undoing of the male judges, a deprecating smile, half apologetic, wholly irresistible. The others, compared with these two, were negligible. The judges were unanimous. Section one passed on and out.

Enoch began to wish himself back at the Walk, as he thought of the parents, brothers, sisters and lovers of these pretty girls. He could hear comments: "Number Three wins"—"Number Seven is a darling"—and then a man's voice—amazingly articulate: "If Seven is an orphan, I'll adopt her." This remark was received with cheers, and a treble voice from the back row said piercingly: "Go you one better—I'll marry her."

Order! Order!

Section two came on. Nobody in it of outstanding

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merit except Felicity. To Enoch's dismay, she looked too much like an image. Nevertheless the judges lost no time in setting down her number.

Section four held the winner of the Bristol Beauty Competition. The flood lights blazed mercilessly upon lips not virgin of lip-stick, upon a nose slightly over-powdered. The lady in the Chair murmured, half to herself: "Chocolate-boxey." Suddenly the audience began to laugh. Why? Enoch, guileless man, was told the reason afterwards. A potential winner had burked her chances by giving the Dean's verger too glad an eye——!

Eight survivors appeared for the semi-final parade. Out of these eight, the judges had to select three prize-winners. Then would follow the big decision.

The curtain fell, and rose to disclose the Editor of the *Western Banner*, who announced that the judges had chosen 54, 3, and 7.

Pandemonium! And quite impossible to say whether or not the house approved the semi-final verdict. Enoch decided that it did; and he was sure when the three appeared because the applause was so overwhelming. The Hebe of Taunton panted with excitement. The pocket Venus had shrunk. Felicity, being the eldest, was the calmest, but Enoch hardly dared to look at her. Why didn't she smile? Her pose was perfect, the pose of the unknown woman. Each judge, pencil in hand, gazed long and steadily at the finalists.

Why didn't Felicity smile?

Then a raucous voice gave expression to what every man and woman in the huge audience was feeling.

"Time! Time! Put 'em out o' their pain!"

Hebe laughed; the pocket Venus giggled; Felicity smiled.

It was the youthful smile that had captivated Enoch when he was a boy of twenty. The dimple had gone,

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but what of that? Cheering broke out again, louder than ever. . . .

Ballot papers were handed to Enoch. He saw at a glance that two ladies had voted for Felicity; two men had voted for Hebe; one lady had voted for the pocket Venus, but finding herself in a minority she decided to vote for Hebe. Enoch set down Fee's name. Three votes for Number 54; three votes for Number 3.

One of the judges happened to be a well-known artist living near Fountains. He knew Enoch well, and respected him as a connoisseur of Gothic architecture. Disdaining to ask the ladies to change their minds, he whispered to Enoch impatiently: "Number Three could earn her living as a model; she could pose as Venus de Milo. A noble woman, Saint, nobly planned. I give you my word of honour that she ought to have first prize. Change your vote." Enoch refused to change his vote. He demanded the casting vote from the lady in the Chair, who happily knew none of the three personally. Without hesitation, she inscribed upon her pad—54.

When the announcement was made, Fountains' thundered approval. The wife of the most popular man in the town would be the queen of the town's own Carnival. The artist, concealing his chagrin, said to Enoch: "Fifty-four would be an 'also ran' if she hadn't been dressed to absolute perfection. Who designed that gown?"

"A gentleman," replied Enoch, "who flourished towards the close of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth."

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The lady whom Mr. Kerridge was dishonouring by too fervent attentions, and who wore a frock bought by her but paid for by him, was among the eighty rejected after the first parade.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

After the Fair

I

To the Bishop of Fountains, the Carnival and Fair were rejuvenating—so his lordship said—but, according to Fee and Alf, they made a new man of Enoch. Alf swaggered about as Lord of Misrule repeating: “Enie has tasted blood.” Discreetly he held his tongue about the backing of Treasure Hunt. Nobody in Fountains suspected that the Dean’s verger had fallen from his high estate.

Alone with Enoch, Alf preached the gospel which he practised: “Have a good time.” He had said to Fee, who agreed with him: “Enie has the makings of an honest-to-God sport. When I think, ladybird, of what he’s missed, I get the willies. Seemed to me, correct me if I’m wrong, that the old lad was past praying for. You agree, what?” Fee nodded, pointing out that she guessed what Alf meant. Gratitude for services rendered at the Beauty Competition informed her, as she said with enthusiasm: “Yes, Alf, it’s up to us to get the old hermit crab out of his shell. I pay my debts, I do.” Alf nodded and chuckled. It is likely that he guessed what was in his wife’s mind. His pride in her as Queen of Carnival had, temporarily, brought them together again.

Mrs. Vye, too, rejoiced over the change in one whom she regarded as a son.

“You look as you did, Enie, when you was a sergeant. At this rate you’ll be back in your cradle when I’m at rest in my coffin. My! There’s colour in your cheeks and quite a naughty sparkle in your eyes. But, oh

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dear, it's going to be so dull again after all the fun o' the fair, isn't it ? ”

“ Only if we make it so,” said Enoch.

“ You're ever so clever and such a gentleman. Wasted here, I say. This isn't life for a man o' your parts. Come now—do you like being a verger ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then there's nothing more to be said, dear.”

To his dog Enoch talked more freely. Drake, a sympathetic listener, looked like a gentleman adventurer. Now and again he left Vicars' Walk, where his life was exemplary, and ruffled it in the town, returning home, perhaps, with a torn ear or other evidences of combats. Despite his wounds he would assume a jaunty air and carry himself like a gay Lothario, conveying to his master the conviction that he felt the better for a night out. To this secret sinner Enoch admitted that life without an occasional diversion was vegetation.

2

Time drifted on and on.

Friendship with Alf re-established itself on a business basis. Enoch was persuaded by Alf to deal in the more speculative Industrial Counters. Beginners' luck, once more, stood by. Now and again Enoch backed a winning or a losing horse ; but he had the sense to know that gambling on the Stock Exchange was less of a fool's game. Alf was interested in the actual running of race horses, the sport of kings. Enoch betted in small sums, which he could afford to lose, because he loved the thrill of the evening paper. His transactions, such as they were, on the Stock Exchange afforded another thrill when he glanced at the market quotations. He and Alf talked business whenever they

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met. But the sentimental interest which linked together two men so different in temperament, character, and general outlook had begun when they were boys ; and it was the youth in Alf that resurrected the old boyish friendship. Enoch, being over given to introspection, might have admitted to his faithful tyke that friendship with Alf made easy friendship with Fee, but the Puritan in him repressed such thoughts. Fee was another man's wife ; Fee was his dear little sister—nothing more !

Meanwhile, the friendship between Unity Sibbick and himself was having a stimulating effect upon the gossips in the Walk, although they had to admit regretfully that there could be nothing, well, *nasty* in it. The women were of the opinion that Mrs. Sibbick was setting her cap at Enoch, which may or may not have been true ; but the men were sure that a lonely man sought agreeable companionship. According to them poor Unity had lost her market ; she was at least three years older than Felicity, she had three children, and hardly enough money to pay her bills. The women scoffed at this, convinced that feminine wiles must prevail in the end.

Unity, constantly meeting Enoch at her mother's house, consulted him about the education of Joe, Jennifer and Pauline. Young Joe, so Unity urged, needed a father's guidance. This was a flight of fancy, but it served. Joe, now sixteen, was earning his living, giving most of his wages to his mother, and reckoned to be an exemplary youth. Jennifer was fourteen and very pretty. Pauline, the youngest, happened to be delicate, a wisp of a thing, sharp-witted, affectionate, and ready, you may be sure, to be spoiled by an old bachelor.

To make matters easier for Unity, Enoch had views upon education inherited from his mother. Dean Dyson had fathered them. Enoch disdained certain standards. He looked back upon his own school days with mingled rage and amusement ; he affirmed—to the

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amazement of the Walk—that fear of authority, slavish obedience to Medean rules, snobbery, false ideas, favouritism on the part of teachers, and a horror of originality in any form, had turned him into a shy, shrinking, self-conscious, and secretly conceited idiot. The Dean—Glory be !—had administered antidotes to these banes ; the Dean had directed his mind into the right channels ; the Dean had recognised in him what was individual to him. What he owed to the Dean was, in fine, a debt that must be paid to others. It was paid to Unity's two little girls and to Unity herself. . . .

When the late Mr. Sibbick found what Mrs. Vye so optimistically termed “ perfect peace,” Unity, as has been recorded, found herself in a peck of troubles and a martyr to self-pity. Mrs. Vye had warned her daughter that grievances presented to the sympathetic male were likely to become tiresome. She had said : “ You can do anything with Enoch Saint if you make him laugh.” To Enoch, about the same time, she had said : “ Now, Enie, you have been such a good kind brother to Fee, that I count on you to cheer up Unity. Get the pore soul out of herself. You can do it.” •

He had done it, albeit at first with little stomach for the job. And he had to admit (to himself) that, bit by bit, appetite for such ministration came to him. Unity rewarded him with grateful smiles. When she smiled she looked like Fee. And she had none of her sister's restlessness.

In his relations with her he was circumspect. They rarely met except in Mrs. Vye's house and in her presence. But the children scampered into Enoch's parlour when they pleased. For three years after Eustace Sibbick's untimely decease memorial notices appeared in the local newspapers. The first was highly commended by the Walk : “ To darling Eustace in lovingest memory from Unity, Joe, Jennie and Pauline. *Not forgotten.*” The second was more restrained ; the

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third was almost perfunctory. Then the notices ceased.

By this time, Enoch had realised that Unity's husband had a very Victorian misunderstanding of women. He took things—so Unity pointed out—too much for granted. The little widow, still fair, still on the sunny side of forty, certainly made Enoch laugh when she spoke of unsatisfied cravings:

"We never had tiffs and turns——"

Enoch, thinking of the Dunmow flitch, replied genially:

"How few wives can say that!"

"I can talk freely to you, dear?"

"You can and you do, Unity, which I accept as a compliment. Talk away."

"Well, a loving wife doesn't mind a tiff and turn, 'cos it's lovely to make it up afterwards——"

"I see." His eye twinkled at what he saw. Unity went on:

"Eustace was a good, faithful husband, and a kind father except when he suffered from liver trouble. But he never made any fuss over me. He used to say after closing time 'There you are,' just like that. And, of course, I was there. Where else could I be with three kiddies and one servant? All work and no play for both of us! Eustace never took notice of my clothes; he would sooner read his paper than talk to me. You ain't like that?"

"I noticed you were wearing a new hat last Sunday."

"Eustace had no imagination. May be I have too much; may be I'm romantic——"

She sighed. She looked rather sweet and forlorn. Recalling Eustace, who was as cold as the fish he sold, Enoch felt sorry for her.

"Sometimes—oh, Enie, I wonder whether I dare talk like this to you——?"

"Go on, Unity."

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"I—I used to envy Fee, 'cos Alf was so different from Eustace. You won't believe it, but I told myself that if I were Fee I would forgive Alf for carrying on with other women, so long as he paid me proper attention."

"Alf is half-French."

"Well, if Eustace had been quarter French, I could have stood it. Mine has been a dull life. You've made it brighter, dear, but I see you so seldom."

"Life is damned dull," exploded the Dean's verger.

"Enoch Saint——!"

"I say what *you* think because we're old friends. It is damnable, a—a malediction, that we, you and I, were born either too early or too late. We're neither pre-war nor post-war. Your mother and my mother asked for so little——"

"They got it."

"Yes."

"Why aren't we like them?"

Enoch replied to this aware, perhaps, that a sympathetic and attentive listener would understand about half of what he said. Unity liked the sound of his voice and his unexpected quips. He had a knack of twisting the obvious.

"Why should we try to be like anybody except ourselves? And even then it's the most difficult thing to be honest with oneself, to cut loose from the ideas of others which we know to be fly-blown. There are lots of maggots left in my head. I'm absurdly intolerant of intolerance. I love my own quiet life; I love our Walk; but now and again I have to get out of it. Why? Shall we call it the utterly irrelevant impulse to reveal the primordial monkey, not ape, in me? When this fit seizes me I want to gibber, to stick my tongue out at Dean and Chapter——"

"Enie——!"

"But I come back," he smiled reassuringly, "to my cage for bed and board and—tips."

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"Don't ever tell me you're fond of money."

"I'm very fond of it. But I hate it, loathe it, as a too dominating force. I hate some of our proprieties, because I have to be so prim and proper for eight flours each day."

"Gracious! I know exactly how you feel about that."

"Take legs. It seems incredible that I was once shocked, and secretly excited, when women began to show their knees. My only objection to-day is that most knees are ugly. Backs——! If women wish to show their backs, why shouldn't they?"

"You do say the queerest things——"

"You can't see the man beneath the verger."

"Oh, I do—I do. And—and I like the man best." She blushed very faintly. "It's sweet of you to talk to me as you do. I suppose you talk like this to Fee?"

Enoch hesitated, surprised to discover that hitherto he had spared Fee his mental divagations.

"Well, I don't. Fee would think me rather an ass if I did, and probably she would repeat my ramblings to Alf. You can't tell Eustace."

"My! You are different from Eustace."

"Why did you marry Eustace?"

"Why did I?"

"Perhaps he was the first——"

"He was. How clever of you to guess that!"

"Perhaps, too, you fell in love with love. I love my love with an 'r', and that little 'r' changes love into lover."

"You do put things in an odd way. Sometimes I think that you ought to have been a parson or a schoolmaster."

"I might have been either, but for the saving grace of Dr. Dyson. I have a nightmare vision of myself as Justice Bolt, who 'grew so fond of teaching that he taught those who instruction needed not nor sought.'

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I have tried to teach your children that they must teach themselves."

"They adore you," said Unity. "If you were their own Daddy, they couldn't love you more than they do."

The soft, appealing, grateful, upward glances which might accompany such acknowledgments generally provoked an exit. Still, it was such a comfort to let off steam before Unity, and an abiding satisfaction to make life a little less dull for her.

3

Jennifer and Pauline took a proprietary interest in Drake. When his master was on duty Drake betook himself to Mrs. Vye's house, or to Unity's. But he seldom failed to be at home when Enoch passed through the Gate House. The children had a joke: "Drake knows." Enoch read aloud to them the *Just So Stories* and the *Jungle Book*. Unity had told Pauline that good little girls must discriminate between love and cupboard love. Pauline promised her mother that she would not ask Uncle Enie for pennies or sweetmeats; but the imp whipped the devil round the stump by suggesting to Drake, in Enoch's presence, that he knew, being so wise a tyke, what she wanted. This procedure became so successful that both girls, if they had an objective in view, would talk confidentially with Drake, when Enoch, a few feet away, might be reading a book. The children long ago had artlessly taken for granted that they couldn't disturb Uncle Enie. Whenever Mum had visitors, the pair legged it across the Walk and into Enoch's parlour. Whenever they had tea alone with him, they were expected to submit a "budget" of news. They were also expected to express themselves nicely, avoiding slang if possible.

Shortly after the Carnival, the three were together

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at teatime with Drake in attendance. Jennifer addressed him :

"Darling Drake—" Drake wagged his tail. "I wish you'd tell Uncle Enie that I want to leave school and learn dressmaking."

Pauline piped up :

"Drakie, she's lying. She wants to go to the films and be Queen of the next Carnival. You think, don't you, that such a silly ought to be spanked?"

"I'm too old to be spanked," said Jennifer.

To her chagrin, Drake's master was lying back in his chair, smoking his pipe, and apparently uninterested.

"Did you hear what I said, Drake, or shall I say it again—louder?"

Drake barked.

"Why is that dog barking?" asked Enoch.

"He'll tell you presently," said Jennifer. "You mustn't listen in, Uncle; we're having a private conversation."

"Shall I leave the room?"

"Please don't."

Enoch smiled and closed his eyes. Pauline began :

"Drake, wouldn't you love to come and live with us?" No reply. Pauline continued : "You know you will live with us, or we shall live with you, when Uncle marries Mum."

Enoch stirred uneasily in his chair, but like Drake he held his tongue because he was not sure of what to say.

"If Uncle marries Mum, me an' Jennifer will promise to love, honour and obey him, won't we, Jenny?"

Jennifer betrayed nervousness.

"Shut up! she whispered.

"Our Walk," continued Pauline, unabashed, "says that Uncle ought to marry Mum."

"Shush-h-h!"

"I won't shush-h-h. Uncle Enie——"

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"Yes, Pauline?"

"You heard what I said to Drake. Don't pretend you didn't. Now—what about it?"

Enoch dissembled.

"It sounds splendid, but you see, children, I've had no practice with the father business. I might make such a mess of it. Why, I'm not your real Uncle, only a sort of chance uncle."

"If you were a real uncle you couldn't marry Mum. If you won't marry Mum," continued Pauline, "you might like to marry me, but you'd have to wait for ever so long, and old Mrs. Sumshion says that you're getting more of an old bachelor every day. The Walk would be ever so pleased."

"Why," exclaimed Enoch, apostrophising the ceiling, "have I encouraged these young ladies to talk to me with such engaging frankness?"

"Mum," declared Pauline, "thinks you're a lovely man, the best ever. If you say the word, I'll ask her to step across. Shall I? Let's——"

"That would spoil a good joke."

"'Tisn't a joke."

"We'll put it like this," said Enoch nervously. "You two have paid me a nice compliment, but you will spoil it if you talk about it. Let it remain a secret. Your mother might feel hurt and ashamed if she knew that you had talked like this."

"Not she," said Pauline.

"Something is going to happen," said Jennifer.

Nothing happened; but Enoch was uncomfortably aware that tongues had wagged. If they went on wagging, old Joe Vye might ask him what his intentions were. Accordingly, he withdrew once more into his

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shell, and told Drake that God intended Enoch Saint to be a man's man.

The summer of 1930 passed without incident.

In mid-September Bessie came back to Fountains. Enoch received a letter which he read and re-read during breakfast. It is significant that he recognised Bessie's handwriting at a glance. It had hardly changed. There were the long-tailed "p's" and "g's", the evenly spaced words (indicating a sense of proportion), and the easy, flowing curves. Enoch had never studied handwriting, but he had thought long ago that Bessie revealed herself in her penmanship, so conspicuously penwomanship. She disdained punctuation; she was careless about crossing her "t's" or dotting her "i's." Obviously she never revised the script, but it pleased the eye.

"Enie dear" (she wrote): "I am coming to Fountains to see you. You can be sure that nobody will recognise me. I have a confession to make. Let me make it in the Chapter House at an hour when we are least likely to be disturbed. You will find me to-morrow under Jack Blandifer's clock at one-fifteen.
—BESSIE."

The letter had been written in Bristol.

When he saw her, his heart was stirred, because she looked sad. Natural enough, inasmuch as she had just left her grandfather's grave. She was wearing black relieved by a touch here and there of pale violet. Was this the garb of the penitent? For the benefit of two elderly persons, she greeted Enoch formally:

"You are the Dean's verger?"

"Yes, Madam."

"Could I see the Chapter House?"

"Certainly."

He unlocked the gate between transept and choir and led the way to the stone staircase. Nobody was in the choir; they were alone.

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When they reached the Chapter House, she held out her hand as soon as she had removed her glove. He noticed how cold it was as he glanced interrogatively at her pale face.

"You are not displeased?"

"What a word between you and me!"

"You look well, younger than when I saw you last. And Fountains—! Just the same——"

"Only outwardly. We try to march with the times, but in the Close we still read the *Morning Post*."

"Enie, you're a cynic."

"I read the *Morning Post* because it's literary, but I'm a Die-easy, not a Die-hard."

"And a Live-easy, aren't you?"

"Perhaps"

They sat down near the central pillar upon the octagonal stone seat which surrounds it. Familiar as he was with this richly decorated room, Enoch's eyes lingered upon the lovely windows and the stalls; but he was aware that Bessie's eyes were upon himself. Somehow, she must have read his thoughts, for she said softly:

"Everything here is part of your life; and these dead stones are alive to you. But they mean so little to me, because I'm such a rebel against what has been. What *is* counts with me. When we met so unexpectedly in the gallery I lied to you. When you left me, what did you think of me?"

"I—I was puzzled."

"Ah-h-h!"

"By your reserves. Now, at this very moment, I don't even know your name——"

"My name is Elizabeth Custard, but I call myself by the name of the man who is the father of my two children, and my good, faithful friend. I wouldn't marry you, Enie, because I loved you; and I refused to marry him because I didn't love him. I wished to be

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free. No one is free. I have remained a slave to myself."

"If you loved me," Enoch asked hoarsely, "why didn't you marry me?"

"She hesitated, laying her hand upon his arm. When she spoke, her words were firm enough.

"I ran away from Fountains, because I was going to be the mother of Willie Hiles's child. I was horribly tempted to father that child on you. You were such an innocent—so unsuspecting!"

"You gave yourself to Willie before you gave yourself to me?"

"I did."

"You loved him?"

"Loved *him*? Never! How did it happen? How do these things happen nine times out of ten? Partly curiosity, partly recklessness, importunity, opportunity, and—don't laugh!—an extra Guinness. There was no excuse for me, none. I—I played with fire. I had resisted Alf Kerridge and others. Willie was a devil. He suggested that I had the name; why not play the game? And, somehow, he gave me to understand that pillion-riding and beanos had to be paid for if a girl was a good sort——"

"I wanted to kill that beast," said Enoch, "and I wish I had."

"Dear Enie!"

To his distress she laughed, the same tinkling, slightly derisive laugh that he remembered so well.

"He wasn't worth hanging for," she suggested.

"Thank God you didn't marry him."

"He seduced me," continued Bessie quietly, "just before the Brenda Gorge picnic, when I fell in love with you. I made up my mind to get you, although I knew that you loved Felicity Vye. Well, I did get you. And I wasn't a bit ashamed of myself till you stood up for me against Joe Vye and the Walk. Then I saw you as

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you were, and myself as I was. And I swore to you that one day I would do something big for you. Little did I think that the chance would come so soon. You joined up, and—and I gave myself to you as a sort of reward for valour. I wanted to give myself. Giving myself to you, the man I loved, seemed to wipe out my giving myself to Willie, whom I had learned to hate. Enie, when I gave myself to you I had no idea of how it was with me. You believe that ? ”

“ I do, Bessie, I do.”

“ Thanks. The rest is much as I told you. Granfer died, and heavens ! I found out that a baby was coming along. *Willie's*—! I wrote that letter to you. Willie stole the answer. He knew he had got me into trouble ; and he told me brutally to marry you. Then he offered to marry me, because I had a little money. That was too thick. We quarrelled ; and I ran away from the Walk and him. I went to my uncle in such misery that he took pity on me. God pitied me too : the child was born dead. My uncle suggested that I might be trained as a nurse. I remembered that my father had been an actor. I tried to get a job on the stage. Hopeless ! Finally, my uncle persuaded me to learn typing and stenography. It was deadily dull work, but I stuck to it ; I had to. I had lost my looks, but they came back. The war was not over ; any girl not a fool could get a job and every girl wanted to do her bit. I had a fairly decent billet working for a man at the Admiralty. I did his typing and drove his car. I was most awfully sorry for him. He had money but little else. His wife had left him. He had broken down in health. But he stuck to his job ; and I stuck to him. Eventually I told him everything. He was, and is, a very understanding person. He made a sort of lady out of me. I mean he made me lady-like. To please him I toned myself down. After the war we travelled about together. Then his wife divorced him, and he offered

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to marry me. He had bought for me a small house in Hampstead and settled money upon me after the children were born. I would rather not tell you his name, but you must understand that he is a man of position, in the public eye. All his friends know about me. If I married him both of us would be in an intolerably difficult position. I am satisfied ; so is he. . . .”

Her soft voice died away.

5

Enoch was profoundly moved. He knew what Bessie must have suffered before she left Fountains. Well, she had quality, that quality in man or woman so beloved by Dean Dyson. The ladies of the Close might say that this unmarried mother had lost her character ; but losing it she had gained it.

“ I had to tell the truth,” she murmured.

He took her ungloved hand and kissed it.

“ Thank you, Bessie. You did the big thing for me. I have had hard thoughts of you——”

“ Inevitably.”

“ Had I known the truth, would I have asked you to marry me ? ”

“ No ; because you didn't really love me.”

He remained silent.

“ What Willie did to me, I did to you. It was mating-time for both of us. When you first kissed me in the Gate House refectory, you were thinking of Fee.”

“ Perhaps I was ; I—I don't know.”

“ Is she happy with Alf Kerridge ? ”

“ Intermittently.”

“ Have you remained unmarried, because you thought that she and I had let you down ? ”

“ Don't ask such questions. They lead no-whither, or

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into a vicious circle of regrets. I suppose I'm incurably romantic ; you are practical, as women have to be. Tell me about your children. Are they boys ? ”

“ Thank God—yes.”

Then for a few minutes, he beheld a new Bessie. He divined from much that she left unsaid that her children had made another woman of her. She was incapable of being sloppy about them, although, obviously, she was living again in them and for them.

At the end of the too brief interview, she surprised him.

“ I shall leave by the western door. If you go out by the north door, you will see a car opposite the Deanery. In that car is the man who has been so good to me. If you look at him you may understand why I have tried to be good to him.”

They returned to the cathedral church.

6

Enoch passed the car slowly. In the back seat, reading a book, sat a man past middle-age. He might have been a distinguished barrister or a judge. He had a shrewd, kindly face devoid of colour, but not unhealthily so ; he was thin and slightly ascetic with eyes deeply set. The hand that held the book was delicately modelled. . . .

Barely more than a glimpse, but it sufficed. Bessie had been lucky to find such a friend ; her children were fortunate in their father. Yes ; the wind had been tempered to Elizabeth Custard.

Once more, and this time with finality, he put thoughts of her from him. She had ceased to be the Bessie of his youth. In London she had provoked curiosity ; in Fountains she had satisfied it. He had loved two women. It was extremely doubtful whether

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he could have made either happy, had he remained what he was—a verger. He recalled a jest of George Robey's. The comedian, solemn as Sir Oracle, had entreated the happily married men in a vast audience to stand up. One young man did so. "How long have you been married?" asked George. The young man admitted bashfully that he was on his honeymoon. "Call again in a month's time, sir, and if I repeat my request, you'll stay sitting." The laughter which this provoked annoyed Judith, sitting beside her brother, but, questioned by Enoch, she had to admit that post-war marriage was more than ever a lottery. Both parties exacted too much of each other.

Mrs. Golledge, good faithful soul, may have had an inkling of the talk between the chance uncle and his nieces, inasmuch as the wall between kitchen and parlour was none too thick; and Pauline's voice was clear and articulate. Certainly Mrs. Golledge took extra pains to make her master comfortable, and passed what she took to be appropriate remarks.

"Mattermony ain't no way what 'tis cracked up ter be. I'd more than I bargained fur wi' Sam in less than six months. Course when they was top-dog the men-folk treated us wunnerful peevish. I mind me when I said to me lord an' master: 'Now, Sam, you bain't seemin'ly quite yerself this be—utiful marning,' an' that was arter he come home the night afore an' went to bed wi' his closes on. And he up an' sez to me: 'Never you mind whether or no I be meself; what irks me is that you, Susan, be the same damned ole fool ye've allers bin.' Would 'ee talk like that, zur, to any 'ooman?"

"Not without great provocation, General."

"Ah-h-h! you might git tha-at nowadays. Turn an' turn about be only fair. 'Tis the wives' turn to swear at the men, an' swear they do, the Bolshies. Afore the Cardinal an' Fair, I told 'ee to pick an' choose a

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modest country ma-aid, an' you sez, laughin' like, there baint no sech ma-aids left. You was right! An' when I kneels down to say me prayers, I thanks God A'mighty fer keepin' of 'ee single."

"Thank you, General."

"I'll tell 'ee one thing more. I wouldn't work fer no young married 'ooman, no, not if me celery was doubled. Fur why? 'Cos the 'ussies thinks they demeans theirselves if they do more than wash out their stockin's. It's God A'mighty's mercy, I sez, that they won't have no children. Whatever would their brats be like? I ask 'ee."

"Ask me something easier," said Enoch.

"To my notions this yere mattermony baint holy no longer. If a darter o' mine should ast me if she did oughter marry, I might say 'yes,' but if my son put that ther questching, I'd say 'no'. Everythink be upside down in such a way as never was. Be I talkin' good sense or fullishness?"

"You offer one solution to a grave problem, General. According to you what is sauce for the goose may mean sauce of a less appetising kind for the gander."

"Yes, but I never did think that I'd live to see the day when the men-folks had to up an' run away from the women."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Devil's Luck

I

TOWARDS the close of February, 1931, Enoch was returning from London to Fountains. Being a cautious person, set in his ways, he ran no risks of missing trains, although aware that he had missed much else deemed of importance by his fellowmen. However, apart from this, a huge station, such as Paddington, never failed to exercise his imaginative powers. Indeed, long ago, he had bought cheap at a sale the engraving of Frith's picture which he regarded as the work of a craftsman who understood human nature rather than the masterpiece of an artist.

Having secured his ticket, the evening paper, and a second-hand copy of a half-guinea book dealing with the Head-hunters of the Upper Waters of the Amazon, Enoch was sauntering along the platform, when he was smitten hard from behind on his shoulder.

"Gosh! The old rabbit himself—! Returning to the hutch—what?"

Enoch turned to behold Alf boisterously and exasperatingly alive. An absurd impulse to take to his heels beset him. He hated to talk in a railway carriage to the accompaniment of whirling wheels; he loved to bury himself in an absorbing book.

Alf grabbed his arm.

"What a slice of luck for you, o' man! I can give you a corking cigar and a spot of old brandy afterwards. Luck has turned. Time it did. We'll try to find a carriage to ourselves."

This was easy enough, inasmuch as they were

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travelling by an express train with a "slip" carriage at the end of it in which they found an empty compartment.

As the train slid out of the station, Alf began his epic: he had been to Sandown.

"I'm looking forward to a rare lark with Fee; you're in on that, Enie. Just before we parted, two days ago, we had a dust-up."

"Strange, passing strange," murmured Enoch ironically.

Alf took this as a fitting contribution to the gaiety of the moment. The quiet humour of an old friend amused him. He envied Enoch his powers of speech; and possibly he may have felt that he didn't deserve his friendship; quite aware, in a quick-witted Gallic fashion, that his staid friend "got even with him," so to speak, with sly, sub-acid comments.

"Yes, me lad, Fee refused to kiss me good-bye. I wouldn't say a word against the pet to you——"

"Say it," enjoined Enoch. "Get it off your chest."

"Perhaps I treated her rough——"

"Impossible to believe that——"

"Shut up! I say that women like being treated rough; man-handling excites 'em. Here! I promised you a cigar. Light up! And go easy with it. It's a beauty."

Enoch accepted the cigar. It was a beauty; and he lay back in his seat prepared to enjoy himself, deciding that Alf must be allowed to tell his tale without interruption.

Meanwhile the train was speeding out of London, racing the Dean's verger back to sleepy Fountains after an unusually pleasant visit to Judith and her husband. Alf's voice seemed to float from a distance through a scented mist of tobacco smoke . . .

Fee, it appeared, had been "nasty," because Alf had gone to Sandown; Fee, not without reason, had

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come to the conclusion that Alf was a confirmed backer of losers.

"Born in your Walk, Enie, she hasn't ever got really an' truly away from it."

"Rot!"

"You can take it from me that I know. In her dear little heart she doesn't hold with betting, card-playing, and the like, *unless she wins*."

At this quip Alf chuckled and wriggled with delight, as if he were a boy contemplating with twinkling eyes the consummation of a successful practical joke. Enoch laughed. The irrepressible imp in Alf defied the years. Enoch recalled an incident of their school-days, when Alf was a Triton and he a minnow. Alf had been hailed before Authority to be caned. This was an exciting moment for the others, well aware that Authority would lay in with relish, because Alf, the most popular boy in his school, was also the most hardened offender against discipline; and he had the air on such occasions of defying Authority to do his worst. The dominie stood on a rostrum with uplifted cane. Alf was holding out his hand. Alert wits perceived and grasped glorious opportunity. The dominie's foot protruded three inches beyond the platform. As the cane whistled downwards, Alf withdrew his hand, and the blow fell crashingly upon the toes of the high executioner——! And then, regardless of consequences, Alf danced about in front of the rostrum, holding his sides, doubled up with laughter. The school laughed with him. Ten minutes later, he got the thrashing of his life, but what cared he?

Alf continued:

"You jolly well know that luck has been dead against me for a month o' Sundays."

Enoch nodded. He, too, accepting "sitters" from Alf, had shared part of this ill fortune, but in a negligible way: risking little more than he could well afford to

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lose, and compensatingly sensible that, win or lose, he revelled in the daily thrill of buying the evening paper. Nevertheless he had not enjoyed what had been thrust upon him lately: helping the irreclaimable Alf to settle up. Alf owed him about fifty pounds. Enoch's losses over slumping Industrials were more serious, but of these Alf and Fee knew nothing—or next to nothing.

Alf described, with more chucklings, his row with his wife, disarming criticism as usual by his artless and artful admission that a little darling couldn't be blamed for losing her temper, because, damn it, she looked so pretty when her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved——!

Having dealt faithfully with the preface, Alf paused and took from a suitcase a large flask.

"This brandy," he said solemnly, "is the goods. I paid fifty shillings for one bottle——"

"You are past praying for."

"Tch, tch! Go easy with me, and take a spot. I didn't buy it to waste it. I intended to drink it by myself, drop by drop, when I needed a tonic. The king hasn't better brandy. I tell you that if I had stuff of this quality to sell, I should ask seven and six a glass for it."

Enoch tasted the elixir, and had to admit that it was superlative.

"Yesterday I backed the winner of the Imperial Cup *and three others*. Couldn't go wrong. I always say: back yer luck, back it! And I did a fair treat. You're coming with me to the old stand. I want you to see Fee's face when I show her—*this*."

He whipped from his pocket a bulging note-case which Enoch surveyed with bitter-sweet emotions. The good luck of the other fellow was a pill to swallow, but it meant repayment of debts of honour. Alf tossed the case into the air and caught it.

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"How's that, umpire?"

"For what you have undeservedly received may the Lord make me truly thankful."

"Out of this," said Alf, "I shall square up with your worship, but *not*, not until Fee has had a glow over it. We shall march in upon her with a hang-dog air, tails tucked tight between our legs, and a 'broke to the wide' expression on our mugs. Fee, being Fee will give us both beans, me 'cos I've backed more losers and you 'cos she'll guess that you've been naughty boy too. Got it!"

"I've got it, Alf, but what did you win?"

"A packet. You wait an' see. My big idea is to chuck the loot at the lamb with an appropriate remark. Then she'll descend from her perch. See?"

Was it the effect of the elixir, or was it a subtle emotion, the impulse to share a dramatic climax which made Enoch pull from his pocket his note-case

"I have something, Alf, which may excite Fee."

He fished out a slip of bluish paper, a ticket in the Irish Free State Hospitals' Sweepstake for the Grand National which he had bought that same morning from his brother-in-law for ten shillings. Flipping it with his nail he observed:

"Not being a fool, Alf, I know that my chance of drawing a prize is negligible——"

"You're right as rain about that. No tickets in sweeps for yours truly."

"Just so; but there *is* the chance. And to-morrow when I'm showing round the trippers and mumbling the same old patter I shall beguile myself by spending money that won't come my way. And the happy thought that the Dean and Chapter would think ill of me for owning this slip of paper will make a poor devil of a verger think less ill of himself. Got that?"

"Enie—I'm proud to be your friend. One more spot?"

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"Thank you—no."

"Gosh! It's luck, not love, which makes the world go round. Won't Fee's face be a picture when I tell her to pick a fur coat out o' my winnings."

"Runs to that, eh?"

"You bet; and more too."

2

They talked on pleasantly enough, till Enoch's attention was distracted by the strange behaviour of the carriage. He heard a sharp exclamation from Alf, but, as he said afterwards, he was fully occupied with his own astonishing sensations. He realised that the carriage had left the rails and was bumping up down and down. He was hurled into a corner. Glancing out of the window he beheld the locomotive at right angles to his line of vision. A huge wheel detached itself and appeared to be trundling straight at him——!

Crash-h-h!

3

Enoch recovered consciousness within half a minute of the catastrophe. In his ears was a curious thrumming. Then he knew that an appalling accident had taken place, and, opening his eyes, he saw that half of the carriage was wrecked.

For a second or two he sat still, palsied with horror, staring at Alf's shattered body. The handsome head had been crushed.

Perceiving that his friend was beyond human aid, conscious that he himself had escaped serious injury by a miracle, he attempted to leave the carriage. Both doors were jammed. . . .

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He heard women screaming.

Glancing up, he saw grey sky above the shattered roof of the carriage. Then, through the shattered window, he could see two men running towards the train. Looking down, still dazed and trembling violently, he stared at Alf's note-case on the floor of the carriage. Mechanically he picked it up intending to put it, for safe-keeping, into his own pocket.

What followed could hardly be described as temptation. It was as if part of his brain functioned independently, as it does in a nightmare. To those who suffer from nightmare it is a common experience that the ludicrously trivial may impinge upon horrors. Holding the note-case in his hand, Enoch remembered that Alf owed him fifty pounds which he couldn't afford to lose. He was about to take the exact amount due to him when he saw a man, a passenger, approaching. He opened the case, tore the wad of notes out of it, and was about to fling down the empty case when he reflected that it might be found empty. "In his own case he had a few notes. Feverishly he crammed these into Alf's wallet and dropped it close to the body. A minute later, he climbed out of the carriage and, immediately, was deadly sick. . . .

During two hours he justified survival by working furiously with every other able-bodied man and woman. The accident occurred as the train was passing through a small town. The engine had left the rails after crossing points, carrying several coaches with it. These had been telescoped. Both driver and fireman were killed. . . .

Administering first aid, Enoch could think of nothing else. Many passengers, pinned down by the wreckage, were extricated with the greatest difficulty. Under official direction Enoch did what he was bidden to do. Finally, the injured were removed in ambulances ;

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the dead were laid out side by side near the railway track, unidentified in many cases.

Enoch identified Alfred Kerridge. A police inspector suggested that a fellow-townsmen might break the news to the widow.

"Her mother will do that," said Enoch.

"You will see her mother, Mr. Saint?"

"She lives next door to me."

He found himself in Vicars' Walk three hours later, about ten o'clock.

4

At nine next morning a reporter called upon him. The Bishop and the Dean expected first-hand details. Fountains understood that Enoch Saint had done his duty and more than his duty. At noon, what he most dreaded came to pass. Fee sent for him. Her mother was with her.

She received him in the panelled parlour, sobbing out the first words:

"Alf would go to that hateful race-meeting. I told him he'd lose his money, and I was cross with him. Now, he's lost his life."

"Can't do anything with her yet," said Mrs. Vye. "I've told the child, Enie, that you'll attend to things——"

"I'm doing so," said Enoch.

He was shocked by the change in Felicity; she looked ten years older, faded, white, haggard. When he took her hand, it lay limp in his.

"If he'd kissed me good-bye," she kept on wailing.

"We must choose the grave," said Mrs. Vye.

"Don't you leave me, Mother."

"No, dear, as if I should——"

"I shall kill myself, if you do."

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As they were sitting there, the Superintendent of Police was ushered in. Whispering something to Enoch, he laid upon the table a gold watch and chain, a bunch of keys, two or three letters and the note-case. Then he withdrew. Enoch stared at the note-case. If, by hook or crook, he could persuade the two women to leave the parlour, he could put back the notes. Memory of what he had done under the stress of inexplicable impulse came back to him when he had gone to bed the night before : to bed but not to sleep. He told himself that he had robbed the dead, an abominable crime which admitted of no palliation. He loathed himself.

The Superintendent withdrew.

"What shall I do with these?" asked Mrs. Vye.

Enoch glanced at the watch; it had stopped at the moment of the accident. That would further upset the stricken woman. With a gesture to Mrs. Vye, he said quietly :

"I'll put them into a drawer."

There was a drawer in the table, hidden by the tablecloth. Without a word from Fee, who sat huddled up in her chair, but with an approving nod from her mother, Enoch opened the drawer, placed the articles in it, and closed it. The rest would be easy, if he could persuade Mrs. Vye to take her daughter to her bedroom.

"Oughtn't she to lie down?" he suggested.

Fee refused to move, proof against maternal importunity. Her eyes wandered from one familiar object to another.

"I want to stay here; this was his room."

Finally Enoch withdrew. He had to give undivided attention to everything connected with the funeral. To his dismay he found himself once more the Man of the Moment. Vicars' Walk was of opinion that his life had been spared because it was worth sparing.

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5

On the eve of the funeral, Unity, over a cup of tea in her mother's house, alone with Enoch for a few minutes, dealt him a staggering blow.

"Has Mother told you?" she asked.

"Told me—what?"

"Fee will be poorer than I am. There's talk of her living here with Mother."

Agape with surprise and distress Enoch had to listen to a jeremiad bristling with details and irrelevancies. Alfred Kerridge, had he lived, would have found himself in the Bankruptcy Court. The Open Arms was mortgaged; hardly anything would be saved from the wreck of a once handsome fortune. . . .

"Money just trickled through his fingers, Enie; and you know as well as I do that she, poor dear, helped him to spend it. Light come, light go. She doesn't know yet how bad things are; but Alf's solicitor had a talk with Mother yesterday, and Mother says that, after the funeral, *you* can prepare her——"

"*I* can prepare her——?"

"It'll take a good man like you to do it. Alf died in debt to nearly every big tradesman in the town. Mother says it's a wonder how he carried on so long as he did. But, there, he did have such a way with him."

Unity sighed, dabbing at her eyes, and wondering why Enoch remained silent, but she noticed that his fingers twitched.

"This is awful," groaned Enoch.

"Yes, isn't it? Someway to me, and I've been through the tunnel myself——" Unity paused, sensible that she might have expressed herself less colloquially. "I mean to say, dear, that a widow, when she's not properly provided for, does feel the loss

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so much more keenly. Thank goodness there are no orphans."

"I'm to tell her that she's nearly penniless?"

"Mother thinks you'll do it so beautifully."

"Your mother ought to do it."

"Oh, well, Fee wouldn't believe Mother. Queer to think that she and I, born in the Walk, have had to come back to it."

Enoch nodded, glanced about him helplessly, seized his hat, and went out.

He walked into the Close, passed through the Cloisters, and sat down upon a bench facing the Palace moat, staring at the bit of rope which the swans pulled when they wanted food.

In his breast pocket were the notes which he had taken from Alf's wallet. How could he return them to Fee without making full confession?

He decided that he must act at once. From his knowledge of Fee and her mother it was likely that Alf's note-case and watch were in the drawer—forgotten. After the funeral Fee might remember. If he were left alone in the parlour for a couple of minutes, and if the note-case had not been taken from the drawer, all would be well; and a strange conviction sustained him that all would be well.

He looked at his watch. Nearly seven. The inn was closed till after the funeral. Alf's coffin, covered with wreaths, lay in the principal reception room. Nobody in Fountains had seen what lay inside. Fee would remember her husband as she saw him last, a fine, handsome man. She had taken a mournful pleasure in receiving "floral tributes" from innumerable friends, unpacking them, and placing them upon the coffin. More wreaths would be coming in.

He was shown into the parlour and told that Mrs. Kerridge would be with him in a minute. As the door closed behind the maid, Enoch crossed to the table,

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lifted the cloth, opened the drawer, and—to his intense relief—found watch and chain and note-case apparently as they had been left two days before. He opened the wallet, removed what was in it, replaced Alf's wad of notes, and walked to the fireplace. Among his own few notes he saw the ticket of the Irish Hospitals' Sweepstake.

He had forgotten that.

Fee came in in her weeds, looking pitifully white and sad. She held up her face to be kissed. Enoch spoke of something trivial to which Fee paid scant attention. Obviously she wanted to talk about the wreaths. Then, suddenly, she mentioned the future.

"I'm going to live with Mum, Enie; I'm coming back to the Walk?"

How much did she know? He waited patiently.

"I—I couldn't carry on here alone. Mum wants me; and I want Mum. You understand?"

"Of course I do," he said soothingly, glad to perceive that she was calmer. But he perceived also that she was more reserved, apathetic. He divined that her mother had prepared her for further bludgeonings. Warmth flowed into her voice as she began to thank him for his services.

"Please, please——"

He enjoined silence, holding up a protesting finger which she disregarded.

"You have been wonderful, Enie. Such a help! So good. But then you are good; you were born good. How I wish that I were good like you!"

"Good in streaks," he said, scornfully.

She wondered why he frowned. He was telling himself that now he was rehabilitated, the Dean's verger of blameless life. The bold, buccaneering "Gent" of other days had ceased to be——! What a change, too, in her!

After he had taken leave of her, walking back to

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his own lonely house, he thanked God that an opportunity to return money taken from the dead had been vouchsafed him. The open drawer, with the watch and note-case, was before his eyes. Then, with a sharp inhalation of breath, he remembered what had escaped notice at the time. The bunch of keys and the packet of letters were not in the drawer. Fee must have removed them. Of course, she wanted the keys. How fortunate it was that she had left the other articles.

For the first time since the accident, he was able to eat with appetite. He had lighted his pipe when Mrs. Vye came in.

"As soon as the funeral is over," she told him, "I'm taking Fee away. We are going to Weymouth. When I bring her back, Enie, you must tell her how little is left. Whilst we're away, you will see Alf's lawyer and talk things over with him. The good-will of The Open Arms is about all she has. Two or three want to buy that. Everything else is upside down, but being, I hope, a good Christian woman, I feel that matters might ha' been worse. Alf might have lived——"

"Auntie——!"

"Oh, yes; it sounds heartless and him not in his grave yet, but I'm one to speak my mind, specially to you, dear. Alfred Kerridge was a godless man, and he came near to making a godless woman of my Fee. Someway I feel that she is mine again and a daughter of our Walk. Let bygones be bygones, I say."

"Everybody says that; but what everybody says is generally wrong. What has been may be again."

"My! If you ain't smiling——"

"I smile," said Enoch, "because when I'm more muddled than usual I fall back on platitudes and quotations. I'm incapable of original thought."

"There'll be a rare turn-out for the funeral."

"The first big meeting of creditors."

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"You may well say that, but those to whom pore Alf owed most sent the biggest wreaths. Do you call that throwing good money after bad?"

"I call it a queer kindly twist in human nature."

6

After the funeral Enoch resumed his duties, dismissing horrors from his mind. In a word he slid back into a groove, thankful that he had work congenial to him (and well paid) at a time when two millions of his fellowmen were out of employment.

He resisted the temptation to buy an evening paper. He accepted with a shrug the ever-increasing slump in Industrial securities. His savings, such as they were, had been cut in half. It was exasperating to reflect that old Joe Vye had invested his savings in War Loan, which had not shrunk. On the other hand had Old Joe ever experienced a single thrill in the last twenty years? "To blazes with thrills," thought Enoch. "They lift a man up and then roll him in the dust."

At this moment, when a philosopher believed himself to be immune from the smiles or frowns of Fortune, he received a telegram from his brother-in-law.

*All the best for you. You have drawn a runner.
Letter follows.*

Enoch stared blankly at this message. Again he had forgotten the ticket in the Grand National Irish Sweepstake. He had bought it convinced that he was paying ten shillings for the title deeds of a castle in Spain. It had never occurred to him that if he did win a prize, his name would be published from Land's End to John o' Groats. . . .

Mrs. Vye and Felicity had not yet returned from

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Weymouth. Three days—so Mrs. Vye wrote—of sea air had brought a tinge of colour to white cheeks, so they had decided to stay on a little longer. Meanwhile Enoch had spent wretched hours with Alf's lawyer. The will was simple enough. Alf left everything of which he might die possessed unreservedly to his wife. Everything and nothing were synonyms.

Next morning John Wintle's letter justified the felicitations of his telegram. Enoch was entitled to something approximating to one thousand pounds as the drawer of a "runner," whether he ran or not. And (more food for thought) the big bookmakers—turf-accountants, as they styled themselves—would immediately pester him to buy his ticket, or part of it. A postscript to John's letter adumbrated trouble; a reporter had been told that Mr. John Wintle had sold Ticket M. 6589, to Mr. Enoch Saint of Vicars' Walk, Fountains.

7

Sour indeed are the abuses of publicity!

For the third time in six months Enoch became a notable figure in the public eye.

Fountains divided itself into two camps; between them uncivil war raged. Sweepstakes were illegal. Granted. But, making due allowance for the frailty of human nature, surely the standard of conduct set for cathedral functionaries soared higher than that for mere laymen?

Enoch refused to be interviewed. A second letter from his brother-in-law entreated him not to sell his ticket yet awhile. *Timour the Tartar* (the horse), a sixty-six to one chance, had begun to rise in the betting. He was now at fifty to one.

What would the Dean and Chapter do? They had taken no action as yet. The townspeople, greatly

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excited, spoke of Enoch as the "sporting" verger. It was understood that the Close was grieved.

The tips of the Dean's verger doubled. To trippers Enoch was an object of greater interest than Jack Blandiver. Jack kicked up his heels in rather an unseemly fashion. Enoch, also, had indulged in antics.

The Collegians talked of Enoch's luck, wondering vaguely why he remained so calm and taciturn, but (vaguely again) understanding that Levites may not wander at will outside the Law. Unity echoed the *dictum* of the Walk, when she observed to her father that a verger had to mind his step.

Old Joe was galvanised into mental activity. He twiddled his thumbs and gurgled :

"Enoch, me lad, this is the devil's own luck for you."

"Well, Uncle, I've not discussed this with others, but what do you say about it?"

Mr. Vye made inarticulate noises. His advice, when it came, was sound enough.

"Sell the ticket—sell it before the Dean sends for ye. Then you go into court with clean hands."

"The Dean has no love for me."

"That's why I says—*sell*."

"He may ask me to resign."

"He may."

"I—I couldn't tackle any other job with the same appetite."

"You've good brains, me lad. I mind me when you got the better o' me. That took a bit o' doing." He chuckled. "There are other jobs for a man o' your parts."

"Name one."

"You'd better talk this over wi' my old 'ooman. She'll be back to-night, bringing Fee with her."

"Yes; and Fee's affairs worry me more than my own. I—I might give this ticket to her. Why not?"

"God A'mighty!"

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"I mean it. I can do without this luck, which, as you say, is devil's luck"

"Enie, you mean well, but you're talking foolishly. My daughter has her proper pride. She wouldn't take money from you or anybody else. Fee can live here and take care of her dear mother an' me. Seemin'ly, that's God's will, as I see it."

"Uncle, do you honestly think that we, insects fluttering out of the shade into the sunlight and back again, can dare to say what is or what is not God's will?"

"You're too much for me, me lad. All in, I've been satisfied with my life here below; and I thought you was satisfied with yours, seeing that there's nothing slap-dash about 'ee. Time an' time again, I've sat here in my old chair, smoking me pipe, and comparing you and Alf Kerridge. He asked for a short life and a merry one. Seems as if we *did* get what we want, if we want it hard enough."

He closed his eyes and dozed off.

Enoch took Drake for a walk.

8

Drake, barking joyously, frisked about in front of his master, coming obediently to heel when the pair took the King's highway. Enoch was terrified that the tyke might be killed by a motor car even as his predecessor had been.

"You're a good obedient doggy," said Enoch.

As he spoke Drake espied a lady friend, who whisked round a corner. The good obedient dog, with a yelp of recognition, raced after her. In vain Enoch whistled. What happened round the corner must remain a matter of conjecture; but it is likely that Drake encountered rivals. He came back presently with an apologetic

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air as much as to say that love, after all, to a wise he-dog is a thing apart, and not a towser's whole existence.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" asked Enoch.

Drake gave his liege lord to understand that he ~~was~~ not. Why make a fuss over a passing indiscretion?

They took the hill.

The Mendips were dear to Enoch; so were the Cotswolds. Of mountains he knew nothing. Often, ever since he was a boy, he would fare forth alone seeking some hamlet cradled in the hills. In such remote harbourage he found peace. He could sit down in a sheltered spot and watch the sheep grazing, serenely conscious that he was in the heart of pastoral England, in it and of it.

He paused for a moment at the stile where Bessie, long ago, had called out "Cuckoo"; and he paused again at the spot in the middle of the field where he had met and defeated William Hiles. Willie had beguiled Bessie, even as Alf had beguiled Fee. Why did women give themselves to such men? Had he, Enoch Saint, any understanding whatever of women? He could understand pre-war women, cut to the Sunday-school pattern, such as his mother and Mrs. Vye.

Reaching the highest point of the hill, he turned to survey Fountains.

He gazed intently at the central tower of the cathedral church. It had been built solidly enough, and afterwards raised and decorated. Unhappily this addition was too severe a strain on the original foundations. To save the structure the inverted arches—*anathema* to Dean Dyson—had been introduced. This inversion, to Enoch, was symbolic. At the time, early in the fourteenth century, it had to be; nothing else was possible. What was wrong from an architectural point of view fortified what was right.

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His fancy played about this, as he attempted to readjust what had been wrong in his life with what he held to be right. This splendid tower stood for unsatisfied human endeavour. The super-decoration had been magnificently planned ; and then the piers supporting it had sunk beneath the extra weight imposed. Dean Dyson had said : " Understanding cannot ignore underpinning."

Enoch glanced at his legs.

They were serviceable enough when governed by his head, although misunderstanding, bad or indifferent head-work, might strain them. They were not the legs of an athlete, and no longer the legs of a young man. Charles Lamb (or Swift) might have written an enlightening dissertation on legs. The satirical Dean, thinking of gaitered legs (and how they carried him from Stella to Vanessa) would have indulged his spleen ; and more kindly Elia would have exercised a delicate fancy in treating vagabondage tenderly.

Sitting down, despite the chill wintry air, Enoch took from his note-case the blue ticket.

Suppose *Timour the Tartour* won the National ?

The odds, although diminishing daily, were almost hopelessly against him. If the horse won, and if Enoch kept the ticket, a verger would receive a cheque for three hundred thousand pounds !

It was dark before he reached the Walk. As he passed through the arch of the Gate House, he saw a light in his parlour window. Mrs. Vye, hearing his step on the flagged path, opened the door. She greeted him maternally, but seemed to be excited.

" Fee wants to see you as soon as you can go to her."

" You have prepared her, I suppose, for what I must tell her."

" Oh, yes. She guessed anyway. It's not that. She won't say why she wants to see you. We got back from Weymouth in good time for a cup of tea. After

Devil's Luck

tea she left me for a few minutes and rushed back very excited. She insisted upon my hurrying up here to see you."

"I'll go to her," said Enoch. "How is she?"

"More like her old self. She wanted to come to you; but I said it wasn't quite seemly."

"May be, Auntie, she wants to congratulate me."

"Congratulate you? What about?"

He told her of his luck. Neither Felicity nor she had heard of it.

"Oh dear, my dear, how wonderful! But, Enie, whatever will the Dean say?"

"I can guess what he'll say," replied Enoch, with a frosty smile, "but I'll leave you to guess what he'll do."

"What can he do?"

Enoch glanced again at his legs.

"Invite me, politely, to carry myself and my luck out of the Precincts and find, if I can, another job elsewhere."

Mrs. Vye gasped.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
The Dean's Dilemma

I

UP to the day of Alf's death, Felicity had appeared to Enoch (and others) to be a light-hearted, live-for-the-moment, make-the-best-of-everything creature who had escaped (by some miracle) the trials and tribulations of life. Impossible to take Mrs. Kerridge too seriously——! And ever, when Enoch thought of the sometime *good* girl (which she had claimed to be), who had aroused such a tempest in a shy, clever young man, he recalled tenderly the child, the child demanding a good time. A good time for a good girl.

Now the bad times had come.

"What a friend you are," she exclaimed, as he held her hands, distressed to find them so cold. He perceived that her cheeks were white and her eyelids red.

He winced. Had she discovered that he had returned the notes? If so, he must lie splendidly—lie and keep on lying. Nothing else was possible.

"I know what you have done," she went on.

Enoch reflected that her lawyer must have written to her at Weymouth. A not too dry-as-dust country solicitor might have laid stress upon a friend's efforts (out of working hours) to help a forlorn widow.

"I have only done what your father would have done had he been ten years younger."

She smiled wanly, indicating the sofa.

"Sit down, Enie, and I'll sit beside you. What you have done couldn't be done by father. I have something to tell you about Alf; I must speak of him

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first, and then," she spoke with pathetic doubt in her voice, "I shall try, if I can, to—to think of him——"

"At his best," suggested Enoch, remembering Steerforth.

"If only I could——! I—I haven't told Mum what I must tell you."

"Fee, are you quite sure you want to tell me?"

"I must tell somebody. You are the one kind person whom I can tell."

He made a gesture, distressed by the change in her. She had lost her engaging youthfulness; she had lost too, what was not so engaging in a woman nearing middle age, a mental bloom difficult to describe. During the past year he had thought of her, with exasperation, as too concerned with trivial things, preferring the shadows of what had sufficed her as a girl to the solid substance of maturity, deliberately putting the cart of juvenile amusements and distractions before the horse that surely must be weary after dragging such a load of toys. And yet he had never questioned her intelligence, well aware that Alf had quickened that intelligence and conserved, gay Gaul that he was, her charm. She continued after a pause:

"Alf and I quarrelled before he left here."

"In the train he said something about that to me. He was keen as a boy to put matters right again."

"He told you that I made a fuss about his going racing? I'm sure he didn't say more. I was wretched, because I guessed that he meant to meet that hateful woman in London. And he did. You were here when the Police Superintendent brought his keys and some—*letters?*"

"Yes."

"You slipped the things—I could hardly bear to look at them—into that drawer," she pointed at the table. "I forgot about them till just before the funeral."

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Then I wanted the keys. I took away the keys and the letters. They were *her* letters."

She paused. Enoch, although he guessed that a big draft upon his sympathy was about to be presented, experienced relief. He decided that she had not known about the notes. He heard her voice harden.

"I read the letters after the funeral. They were filthy letters. I burnt them. I could have stood finding out that Alf was unfaithful to me, but those letters made me think of him as a beast. It was one beast writing to another beast——"

Rage began to smoulder in Enoch. In the trenches filth and beastliness had besmirched heroes. He was not raging against a man and a woman whom he knew to be over-sexed, but against the ironies of life. Why had this horror fallen upon so tender a creature at such a moment? Why this cumulation of scourgings? And what could he say to her? In a few minutes he would have to tell the truth about Alf's affairs, he would have to beat a back already flayed——!

He clenched his fists, as his heart thumped against his ribs. He may not have known it then, because his normally cool wits were in the melting pot, but passionate love for Fee had come back. He restrained rage, because the urge to comfort and console was paramount.

He took her hand and held it firmly.

"Fee——"

"Yes, Enie?"

"You say you have burnt these letters. You say you would like to forget beastliness——"

"How I wish I could."

"You can. Imagine what I have seen in France. What I saw drove me nearly mad, but now, here, the memory has grown dim. You wanted good times, didn't you? You had them. That is something. Perhaps good times help us to bear bad times. I—I

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don't know. It may work the other way ; but I, when I think of these things, am most sorry for men and women, millions of them, to whom remembrance is only rue, who have nothing pleasant in their dreary lives, not even one—good—time.”

She made a gesture of impatience.

“ I'm not clever, like you ; but I'm not a fool. I've some of Mum's commonsense. I knew that bad times might come ; but I've told you this because I can't pretend with you ; I—I can't play the grieving widow after reading those letters. I can't carry flowers to Alf's grave, or insert in the paper memorial notices as Unity did.”

“ Of course you can't.”

“ One thing has helped me——”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I've met women, women in this town, who think that all men are beasts. I might think that now if I hadn't known Dr. Dyson, your father, and—you.”

“ Cut me out,” he exclaimed roughly.

“ Cut you out ? What you have done has made me forget Alf and that woman.”

She withdrew her hand, stood up, and walked slowly to the centre table. Out of a hand-bag lying on it, she took Alf's bulging note-case.

“ I found this in that drawer when I came home this afternoon. You see, when I took away the keys and letters, I glanced at the watch and this. I opened this and found in it two or three pound notes. I left it in the drawer, because I meant to keep the note-case just as I found it. Only two persons, beside Mum and me, the Superintendent and yourself, knew that these things had been returned. Only one person knew where they were—yourself. Don't say a word ! Let me finish. I'm so humiliated, so ashamed. I let you see that I was in need of the money.—I wanted to do what was right and proper over the funeral. I remember

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whimpering and wailing before you and Mum. In this note-case, on my return home, I found eighty pounds. You called here the night before the funeral ; you were alone in this room. And, being the man you are, you made me a secret present of eighty pounds. I refuse to touch a penny of it, but I love you for what you've done. It has taken some of the hardness out of my heart."

"The money is your money."

"It isn't."

"Don't you know that Alf and I did business together ? "

"Yes."

"On the quiet ? "

"Of course."

"Business, which, if it had leaked out, would have got me into trouble with the Dean."

"Perhaps."

"Alf had to act as my banker. I dared not give or receive cheques. All our transactions had to be cash. Every fortnight or so we had a settlement. At the moment of his death I was owing him some seventy-nine pounds, thirteen shillings."

"Are you sure about the thirteen shillings ? "

"What a ridiculous question to ask ! "

"Is it ? Dear old fellow, I admire you more than ever."

The faintest smile quivered about her pale lips and vanished.

"I loathe being admired by you," he snapped at her

"You aren't a good liar, because you don't practise lying ; and you have forgotten that Alf talked to me about your business transactions. Please answer one question truthfully. You were in London with Judith ; and you met Alf at Paddington by accident. That was in the paper. Did you tell him to back any horses for you at Sandown ? "

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"N-no."

"Thank you. One of the silly reasons which Alf gave me for wanting to go to this particular race-meeting was that he owed you fifty *not* eighty pounds, and hoped to make a bit so as to pay you. Do you deny this? Ah! You don't. If you did, I should not believe you."

Enoch said nothing.

2

"Tell me exactly what you did do," she went on gently.

"There was a settlement in the train. Alf had backed four winners. He was excited about his luck. He—he squared up with me, and you have guessed the rest. I knew that you would want ready money."

"So you came here, and slipped eighty pounds into this note-case?"

"Yes."

"And you are surprised that I admire you?"

"I repeat: I loathe being admired by you."

"Why?"

"Because I refuse to have your respect and friendship on false pretences. There's a lot of the beast in me."

"Beast in you? Never!"

"Sit down over there. Listen. I'm going to chuck a lot of junk out of a house that you, you, force me to set in order. From that moment when we parted in the Brenda Gorge the house of my mind has been a disorderly house. In it was what I have just called—*junk*: Victorian what-nots, draperies, anti-macassars—! To Hell with them."

"Enie!"

"I hate pretence more than you do. Because you

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had to tell me what you felt about Alf and that woman, I have to tell you what I feel about myself."

"I can't stand much," faltered Fee, bewildered by his vehemence, blinking at him, looking very white and tired.

He told his story badly ; but he made it plain that Enoch Saint, Dean's verger, Collegian of the Walk, Levite of Levites' Row, had the making in him of a thief, liar and even murderer. Knowing that he could trust her, he told her about Bessie ; he told her that he had considered a marriage of convenience with Unity. The climax was the mean action in the wrecked railway carriage.

"You were taking money that belonged to you."

"As if that was any excuse. An old friend was lying dead before me ; and I thought of a miserable debt. We do such things in nightmares. Do you think that I can throw one pebble at Alf or that woman ?"

"You fought your bad impulses ; Alf laughed and yielded to them."

"Much may be forgiven him because he laughed and made others laugh."

"I—I believe I married him because he made me laugh. I'm glad you've told me all this. I'd sooner think of you as not too good."

"I want you to think of Alf as not too bad."

"You've made it easier for me to do so."

3

He was tempted to spare her the details about Alf's affairs, but she opened the disagreeable subject. Obviously, too, she expected the worst ; and, happily, the worst (bankruptcy) had been eliminated. Alf's executors would pay twenty shillings in the pound to many creditors. The goodwill of The Open Arms and

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the sale of the furniture would give the widow an income of some seventy pounds. She wondered at an odd nervousness in his voice, when he asked the question on which, as he knew, his future happiness depended.

"Fee, dear, will you be content to come back to the Walk? Your mother surprised me by saying that it was settled between you."

"Where else could I go?"

"Will you be contented there?"

"Why shouldn't I be now? When we grow older we don't want the things that we had to have when we were young."

Enoch raised his brows. During the past ten years he had often been surprised by her flashes of intelligence. And then, saying wise things, she had done foolish things. She continued:

"I wanted a good time; but lately I have racketed about with Alf till I hated it. I went with him, because it made me so wretched to know that if I didn't he would find somebody else. Two with him was always company. I can guess what you think of my racketings."

"I think of them," said Enoch, "as I think of my own. Youth wants a good time, and youth is sometimes disappointed with it, when he gets it. But if youth never gets it—? Why, then you grab desperately at it in middle age—as I have done."

"As you have done?"

"You haven't heard anything exciting about me?"

"No."

"Then before I tell you, let me say this. I have no faith in hypocritical regrets. If a man makes an ass of himself, he can look with kindlier eyes on other asses."

"What have you done?"

"I may have to leave the Walk. I have drawn a runner in the Grand National Irish Sweepstake."

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"You——?"

"Even I. And, at any moment, the Dean may send for me. This has set half the town by the ears. I'm pestered with questions morning, noon and night. I've received begging letters and threatening letters. I'm in the Public Eye. What with one thing and another I'm fairly dithered."

"Why should you be? I wanted to buy a ticket; but Alf said that millions were buying tickets. What does it mean to you?"

He explained. John Wintle had written again urging him on second thoughts to sell the whole ticket. *Timour the Tartar* might be scratched; John had inside information that he couldn't stay the course and surmount thirty formidable obstacles.

"You will take John's advice, won't you?"

"I'm considering something else. I know that I can't keep this ticket and remain the Dean's verger. I can sell it for about four thousand pounds."

"Four—thousand—pounds!"

"More or less. That means two hundred a year. I earn more than that. If I defy the Dean, I could, of course, buy some small junior partnership elsewhere, and begin again. *Can you see me doing that?*"

This was the dramatic moment for both: an acid test for her. He attempted to read her thoughts and failed. Did she realise the issues? Could she peer into the future? It was hardly decent to do so. He failed to read her; supposed that she could not read him, although every intonation of his voice, every gesture of his thin hands were indicating love for her.

"I—I don't see you away from the cathedral church. I don't see you very plainly."

How could she see him with tears welling into her eyes?

He saw the tears and the distressed face, wondering

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if he dared throw away restraint. Suddenly, she jumped up.

"You must go now, Enie. It's quite late. I wish I could help you. This luck frightens me."

"I've thought of it as devil's luck."

She said heartlessly :

"I'm not fit to mention God's name, but I believe that He doesn't wish you to leave the Walk."

"God—— ? "

"You have not lost faith in Him ? "

"I have lost it and found it, lost it and found it—many times."

"I lost it here," said Fee.

4

He walked slowly back to the Green, passing through the town, well lit since the war. The streets were crowded with young people for the most part ; and nearly every Jack had his Jill. The Jills without Jacks walked together, laughing and chattering, ogling every man they met. Most of them were on their way to the Picture Palaces. Enoch could recall Fountains when it was ill lit, with no places of amusement. What a jolly change for the better ! But, irksome thought, were the middle-aged folk happier then ? It was a day of very small things for them, but the small things sufficed. He had to exchange innumerable greetings. He was the Lucky Man, the luckiest man in Wessex. The younger people now treated him with respect. Youth said "Sir." He missed the familiar dialect. Within another decade it would never be heard save from the lips of gaffers and gammers.

With a sigh of relief he passed out of the noisy market-place into the silence of the Green. It was a cold frosty night with that "orbed maiden," the Moon,

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unable to warm it with her pale fires. He stood still to stare at the Western Front, cursing the ugly scaffolding. When would that be removed? All purses were depleted; charity was degenerating into tyranny. Still, hearts were not yet impoverished. The Dean, to do him justice, played beggar for his cathedral church with austere importunity. The ever-increasing hordes of visitors gave copper and sometimes silver. Nevertheless the Dean had said to his verger upon New Year's Day: "Saint, that scaffolding won't come down till we've collected five thousand pounds"

How lovely the great church was by moonlight! What a majestic fane! At this moment old George Sumshion must be unhappy, because he hated stone-disintegrating frosts. The old stones, so well and truly laid, had withstood the frosts of centuries; the new stones often crumbled.

Staring at the central tower, a thought flashed into Enoch's mind. It is significant that he recognised it as a message from without; it was so startling that he could not conceive it as coming from within. It came with utter irrelevance. He had just decided that he was a fool to court a cold by standing still when a biting north-east wind was blowing. He had remembered that he was late for his supper, and the General would be sure to upbraid him rancorously.

The church was not yet locked for the night. One of the Canons was holding a service for men in the Lady Chapel. Enoch entered to find the nave a silvery moon-lit sanctuary. Nobody saw what he did. What he had to do, he did swiftly and almost furtively.

Five minutes later, the over-heated Mrs. Gollidge tempered the wind of her displeasure to a man who, so she declared next day, had the look upon his face of Saint Stephen when he was being stoned.

"He come in," she told Mrs Sumshion, " nigh upon a nour late, an' his face wur shining. The dear Lord

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knows what 'e'd bin up to, an' I dassn't ax 'un. But that's not all. Oh, dear me, no. He marches into 'is sittin'-room, an' I heard 'un laughin'. When I carries in me homlet flat as flat on the dish, he sez to me, he sez: 'General, I'm very pleased with meself.' But when I sez 'Wotever has you done?' he sez, still a-larfin': 'You'll know all about tha-at the day arter to-morrer.' "

5

Next morning Enoch received a note from Dr. Marsack, asking him to call at the Deanery at ten o'clock. Before he opened the letter, he showed it to Drake, with the remark: "My *Nunc Dimittis*, old chap." Drake may have wondered why his master was smiling, but he was too well-bred to ask indiscreet questions. He noticed that Enoch made a substantial meal, and lit a pipe afterwards with an air of satisfaction. Smoking his pipe, Enoch re-read the note, interested in the Dean's uncompromising caligraphy. He chuckled when he thought of Dr. Marsack as Headmaster of a public school. He must have swished before breakfast hundreds of juvenile offenders. Perhaps it gave him an appetite for a second helping of eggs and bacon.

At ten, Enoch was shewn into the library, where a wood fire smouldered. Outside, frost silvered the Green. Nevertheless the room was warm with memories of the past.

The Dean entered, greeting Enoch with a grim smile. But he invited him, courteously enough, to sit down. Instead of sitting down himself, he walked to the fireplace and stood erect upon the hearth-rug. He spoke incisively as usual:

"Please understand, Saint, that I am the mouthpiece

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of others. You must guess what, most reluctantly, I have to say. Buying a ticket in a sweepstake is a venial offence. To many it is no offence. But it happens to be an infringement of the law of the land. In the opinion of our Bishop, in my own judgment and that of the Chapter, I must, whatever my personal feelings may be, take cognizance of this—thus misdemeanour. There has been, as might be expected, regrettable publicity. You have been spoken of in the Press as the ‘sporting’ vergier.”

The Dean’s emphasis of “publicity” made Enoch realise that he had indeed broken the eleventh Commandment: *Thou Shalt Not be Found Out*

“I want you also to understand, Saint, that I appreciate—no man more—the services which you have rendered so faithfully for so many years. I am sincerely concerned with your welfare.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“His lordship too is very unhappy; he spoke only yesterday of his—his *affection* for you. Under the circumstances I ask you to enlighten me. Your ticket, so I’m told, is valuable. Can you tell me how valuable it is?”

“I have been offered, by a turf accountant, four thousand pounds for it.”

“Indeed——!”

“If I haggled, I might get more.”

“Dear me! This is reassuring. Emphatically I advise you to sell.”

“You would sell, if the ticket were yours?”

“We need not go into that, Saint.”

“I didn’t ask the question out of idle curiosity.”

“Perhaps not. Four thousand pounds is a round sum of money. If you sell your ticket, you are adequately provided for.”

“My position here, Mr. Dean, is a greater thing to me than four thousand pounds.”

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"You can't serve two masters, my dear man. I have no choice in this unhappy matter. It is my duty to ask you to resign your vergership."

"I understand. Would you ask me to resign if I voluntarily renounced all interest in this ticket." ✓

The Dean considered this, stroking his chin.

"I'm puzzled, Saint. Oddly enough that question was raised by a member of the Chapter. Speaking for them and myself, I should not ask you to resign if you voluntarily renounced *all* interest in this ticket."

"Then I remain your verger, sir. I have renounced *all* interest in this ticket. The responsibility of selling it rests with you."

"With me, Saint. What are you saying? What have I to do with it?"

"You are Chairman of the Board that administers the Restoration Fund. Last night I slipped my ticket into the box near the western door."

The Dean gasped.

"You—you have given four thousand pounds to our Restoration Fund? It is—incredible."

"You will find the ticket in the box."

The Dean sat down, frowning. His next words were an indication that he had ceased, temporarily, to be the Dean.

"Really, Saint, this is—how shall I put it?—very naughty of you. I suspect you of taking liberties with my leg."

"I suggest, sir, that if the Irish Hospitals can take a percentage of the profits of this huge sweep, it is in order for the Dean and Chapter of Fountains to regard my ticket as so much conscience money."

The Dean chuckled——!

Nevertheless, to Enoch's amusement, he was sorely perplexed.

"Conscience money——" he repeated.

And then, self-revealed as a human being, the Dean

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inspired his verger to recall an incident long forgotten. Enoch hesitated, before he said slyly :

"I have stolen mulberries out of your kitchen garden, Mr. Dean."

The Dean sat up. What bat was this in his verger's belfry? What on earth did he mean?

"About thirty years ago, when I first joined the choir. I was a miserable specimen of a small boy; but I ought to add, perhaps, that I persuaded two other choristers older than myself to join in the raid."

"Go on, Saint. This is enlightening."

"The gate leading into the kitchen garden was open. We were coming away from choir-practice. There was no one about. I was up the tree in every sense of the word when I looked down and saw Dr. Dyson."

"I shall be interested to hear how Dr. Dyson handled this."

"He said: 'I must deal severely with my gardener for leaving the gate open. *Woe to him through whom temptation cometh*.'"

"Very apt."

"I suppose we looked panic-stricken. We had been caught red-handed and red-mouthed. One of the boys began to cry——"

"Were you that boy, Saint?"

"I was too frightened to cry and too bewildered by what Dr. Dyson said. It seemed to me rather unfair that the gardener should be punished, and if he were dealt with severely for leaving the gate open, what, I asked myself, would be done to *me*?"

"What was done?"

"The Dean said: 'Now that you are here, boys, have a good go at the mulberries, but don't make a habit of helping yourselves to forbidden fruit.'"

"M'm, m'm! That was piling coals of fire upon your pates with a vengeance. And so the incident closed?"

"Not quite. I plucked enough courage to say to

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Dr. Dyson : ' Will it be all right, if we each put a penny into the box for the Clerestory Fund ? ' "

" You said that, Saint ? I'm beginning to understand why you have told me this story. It has application. Tell me what Dr. Dyson replied."

" He said : ' Happy thought, my infant Samuel, the Recording Angel is a Chancellor of the Exchequer. You *can* pay conscience money to him '."

The Dean rose, and held out his hand.

" I must see his lordship about this at once. What action will be taken remains a matter of conjecture."

" My brother-in-law, who sold me the ticket and, without thinking, gave my name to a reporter, fears that the horse, *Timour the Tartar*, might be scratched. In that case the holder of the ticket would only be entitled to one thousand pounds."

" Indeed ! " The Dean appeared to be disturbed. " I shall repeat that to his lordship. I gather that ' If it were done, then 'twere well it were done quickly ' ? "

Enoch bowed and withdrew.

6

He walked out of the Deanery, and into the cathedral church, where he sat down in his robing room. The turning of the tables tickled agreeably his humour ; he had enjoyed another small triumph over a man more human than he had supposed him to be ; he had a tenure in perpetuity of his office ; he would live till he died in Vicars' Walk. But these gains might include a devastating loss. . . .

How would Fee take this sacrifice of four thousand pounds ?

Cold reason whispered that Fee might fail to see beneath the surface ; she might regard what was no sacrifice to him as an unnecessary sacrifice imposed

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upon her, *if* she saw him once more as her lover and, after a decent interval, her husband. Inexperience of women maddened him. It seemed indecent for any woman to think of another man within a fortnight of her husband's death. All the same Nature mocked at such inhibitions. He had turned quickly from Fee to Bessie. Why? Because he wanted something more ardent than friendship, because Fee had aroused in him an appetite which he had tried vainly to suppress because he thought it wicked.

If Fee, when she recovered from her scourgings, still craved for a "good time," marriage with her would be disastrous.

A good time——! Boys and girls, revolting against the discipline of school, wanted it naturally enough. Inexperience did not know what it wanted; inexperience was justified in trying everything; youth had to be served.

A good time. What was a good time when youth had passed? To be avid for excitement in all its forms, to flit after pleasure by day and by night, to attempt to please oneself eternally, to eat, drink and be merry in and out of season, to shun work as if it were a raging pestilence, to scoff at restraint, to ridicule decency, to applaud cynicism and atheism?

Whither did such a good time lead?

To satiety.

He had been reading a book, brilliantly written by a young woman, sincere after its fashion, brutally outspoken. To Enoch it was revolting in its coarseness and immodesty. Modesty to the author was *anathema*. She boasted that her lips were common as the stairs; she flaunted free love; she expressed a wish that she might live to see Upsidonia: marriage cast to the void, the tables of the Law shattered, education, as we see it, rolled in the dust, religion crucified. And this unblushing iconoclast confessed that in the end she had

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found a lover whom she adored! Forthwith this gentleman committed suicide—! That was the most convincing passage in the book. Enoch thought: "Poor devil! What else could he do?"

Another writer had asserted, with some degree of plausibility, that a man who seriously discusses life has ceased to live. Surely that was preposterous? Enoch had come to the opposite conclusion, ripening into conviction. Discussion of life indicated a wish to get out of life what mattered. Youth was incapable of valuations; youth would adjudge a man to be stark, staring mad who voluntarily gave up four thousand pounds.

He thought of old George Sumshion who had worked sixty years, happy in his work.

He thought of Dean Dyson.

Could any sage assert that these two had not lived?

He decided that Fee must be told before nightfall, before the tongues of the gossips began to wag furiously.

7

They met that evening in Mrs. Vye's house at tea-time. Fee had spent the afternoon with her solicitor. It had been decided that she was to leave The Open Arms as reasonably soon as possible.

After tea, Enoch said boldly that he wanted to talk business with her, suggesting that they might do this more at their ease in his house. Fee glanced sharply at him, opened her lips, closed them, and nodded. Old Joe sat half asleep in his armchair; Mrs. Vye looked up alertly, offering no objections, although she thought uneasily of Mrs. Grundy, an invisible but omnipresent Collegian. The wisest person in the room lay on the hearth-rug. He pretended to be asleep and never

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budged when his master followed Fee into the passage. Drake knew what was in the wind.

Outside, it was dark, save for the lights in the houses. The moon had not yet risen. The forty tall chimneys were outlined against a star-lit sky. Enoch paused as they passed through the gate

"Harbourage," he whispered.

"I was glad to get out of it," she whispered, "and I'm glad to come back to it."

A minute later he had installed her in his mother's chair. Then he made up the fire. Mrs. Gollidge was off duty. Fee stared at the enlarged photograph of Lieutenant Saint, wearing his Sam Browne belt. She spoke first:

"Do you want to talk business?"

"Yes; my business, not yours. This morning the Dean sent for me; he asked me to resign —"

"I hate that man; he isn't a man; he's a machine."

"He's a man all right. If I told you that I *had* resigned, what would you say?"

"What could I say? I should feel miserable."

"Why? You have urged me again and again to get out of the Walk."

"Perhaps I knew you couldn't. Anyway I knew that last night. Will you have to resign?"

"Not now, because I told the Dean that I had renounced *all* interest in my ticket."

"Whatever have you done with it?"

"Last night, after leaving you, I slipped it into the box of our Restoration Fund. The Dean who, officially, has to maintain that sweepstakes are illegal, is now in possession of the ticket, and he is torn in two between the Letter of the Law and a sum of money that might remove that hideous scaffolding from the western front."

It took nearly half a minute for Fee to assimilate this. Then she began to laugh. It was rejuvenating

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to hear such laughter. Finally, between the gusts of laughter, she gasped out :

"It's just right. It's the best thing that ever happened. Nobody else could have thought of it, nobody."

"Bless you, Fee. But Fountains will speak of me for ever and ever as a damned fool."

"You don't care what Fountains says ? "

"Not a bit—if you don't."

They looked at each other long and steadily. Did she read his thoughts ? It is certain that the Walk imposed upon both restraint. She knew that he was gazing at her hungrily ; possibly she did not know that she was gazing at him as hungrily.

Suddenly, she became conscious of her weeds, the "blacks" which the Walk reckoned to be a widow's only wear. She gave a little shiver and placed a finger upon her lips.

"A secret, Fee ? " he whispered.

Colour stole into her cheeks as she nodded.

THE END.

